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A monthly review *edited by Hilton Kramer*

Modernism and its enemies *by Hilton Kramer,* 1

Politics, politics, politics—the PEN Congress in New York *by Roger Kimball,* 8

The Saatchi Collection *by Sanford Schwartz,* 22

New poems *by Daniel Mark Epstein & Donald Justice,* 38

Art: Hayter's line and Golub's message *by Jed Perl,* 45; **Theater:** Aunt Dan and Wally *by Mimi Kramer,* 54; **Music:** A great Spanish pianist *by Samuel Lipman,* 61

Books: *Robert Stone* Children of light *reviewed by Bruce Bawer,* 65; *Robert Fitzgerald* Enlarging the change *reviewed by Sonya Rudikoff,* 72; *A. N. Wilson* Gentlemen in England *reviewed by Donna Rifkind,* 79; **Letters:** Marxism, Princeton & Lawrence Stone *with an editorial reply,* 84

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Modernism and its enemies

by Hilton Kramer

Nowadays, for anyone who takes a keen interest in the arts and has acquired the habit of making them an object of critical thought, there is one issue—or perhaps I should say, one debate—which is more and more found to overshadow all others, and that is the debate over the nature and destiny of modernism. This debate takes many forms and addresses itself to a great many aspects of cultural life, from the most purely aesthetic to the most explicitly political. Moreover, the participants in this debate are extremely diverse. They include not only the expected artists and critics and patrons of the arts, and the administrators and publicists who preside over our arts institutions, but also specialists in the social sciences, political activists and theorists, journalists and editorial writers, and philosophers, intellectuals, and academics of all kinds—all of whom have lately discovered in the problem of modernism a subject they deem to be central to the cultural and political life of our time. All tend to enter into this debate with strong feelings, and indeed pronounced passions, which are not always based on a mastery of the materials under discussion but which nonetheless derive from a sense that something important has changed in the relation of culture to society in our world, the world of the bourgeois democracies, and that the key to this change is to be found in that complicated conjunction of historical developments which generally goes under the name of modernism.

A debate which elicits the fierce polemical participation of so many diverse parties and interests is not easily summarized, to be sure, yet its salient features are, I think, now sufficiently clear to be identified and examined; and it is to this task that I wish to address myself here. I do not come to this subject as a neutral observer, of course. The most striking feature of this debate about modernism is—as the title of this paper suggests—the extraordinary degree of *enmity* it exhibits toward modernism itself; and in relation to this fierce enmity I wish to speak here as something of a champion and defender of the phenomenon that is now under attack. For it seems to me that in this attack on modernism by its enemies what is really at stake is something essential to the vital cultural life of our democratic society.

At the outset of this discussion, it will help us to understand both the intensity of this attack on modernism and its amazing scope if I offer some examples which can be held in the mind, as it were, as specimen citations from what is already a vast critical literature. Examples that commend themselves for this purpose abound, alas, as every publishing season for years now has added new and ever more vehement contributions to the fray. From Tom Wolfe's *The Painted Word* and *From Bauhaus to Our House,* on the one hand, to T. J. Clark's *The Painting of Modern Life* and Serge Guilbaut's *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art,* on the other, all shades of political opinion

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are represented, and in the case of at least one book, Suzi Gablik's *Has Modernism Failed?*, which calls for nothing less than a reformation of human nature itself, this literature has even acquired something akin to a religious dimension. Since the subject is now close to constituting a virtual subdivision of the book-publishing industry, it was inevitable that college textbooks would also be issued, and the alert firm of Harper & Row has been quick to establish its priority in the field with three titles widely used in the classroom: *Modern Art and Modernism*; *Modernism, Criticism, Realism*; and *Pollock and After*; all published in the last four years and all organized to promote a more or less Marxist interpretation of the subject.

From this large and burgeoning literature I shall offer only three representative citations drawn from very different political perspectives. The first and longest comes from an essay by a critic immensely influential in academic circles, Fredric Jameson, who, after much competition among the universities for his intellectual favors, has lately settled into a chair at Duke University. Jameson's text is entitled, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," and appears, incidentally, in another of those anthologies designed for the classroom—*The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture.*[1] In this essay Jameson is concerned to explain why, as he says, "classical modernism is a thing of the past and why postmodernism should have taken its place." The reason for this historic shift, Jameson writes, is to be found in what he calls "the end of individualism as such." And on this subject he offers the following commentary:

> The great modernisms were . . . predicated on the invention of a personal, private style, as unmistakable as your fingerprint, as incomparable as your own body. But this means that the modernist aesthetic is in some way organically linked to the conception of a unique self and private identity, a unique personality and individuality, which can be expected to generate its own unique vision of the world and to forge its own unique, unmistakable style.
>
> Yet today, from any number of distinct perspectives, the social theorists, the psychoanalysts, even the linguists, not to speak of those of us who work in the area of culture and cultural and formal change, are all exploring the notion that that kind of individualism and personal identity is a thing of the past; that the old individual or individualist subject is "dead"; and that one might even describe the concept of the unique individual and the theoretical basis of individualism as ideological. There are in fact two positions on all this, one of which is more radical than the other. The first one is content to say: yes, once upon a time, in the classic age of competitive capitalism, in the heyday of the nuclear family and the emergence of the bourgeoisie as the hegemonic social class, there was such a thing as individualism, as individual subjects. But today, in the age of corporate capitalism, of the so-called organization man, of bureaucracies in business as well as in the state, of demographic explosion—today, that older bourgeois individual subject no longer exists.
>
> Then there is a second position, the more radical of the two, what one might call the poststructuralist position. It adds: not only is the bourgeois individual subject a thing of the past, it is also a myth; it *never* really existed in the first place; there have never been autonomous subjects of that type. Rather, this construct is merely a philosophical and cultural mystification which sought to persuade people that they "had" individual subjects and possessed this unique personal identity.

Jameson then goes on to identify the aesthetic dilemma which follows from this analysis. The older models, as he calls them, naming Picasso, Proust, and T. S. Eliot, "do not work anymore (or are positively harmful), since nobody has that kind of unique private world and style to express any longer." The only thing now possible, in this view, is for culture to turn to pastiche and parody, and this means, he adds, that "con-

1 *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture,* edited by Hal Foster (Bay Press, 1983) pages 111-125.

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temporary or postmodernist art is going to be about art itself in a new kind of way . . . that its essential messages will involve the necessary failure of art and the aesthetic, the failure of the new, the imprisonment of the past," etc.

The second passage I want to cite approaches the debate from a very different perspective—one that takes abstract art, especially the kind of abstract painting that was produced in New York in the heyday of the Abstract Expressionist movement, as emblematic of the evils caused by the spirit of modernism. Here the writer is not an academic but a journalist, Roger Starr, a member of *The New York Times* editorial board and formerly the housing commissioner of New York City. In Starr's view, many of the catastrophes which have overtaken New York City in recent decades can be traced to, of all things, abstract painting and the modernist impulse as he understands it to be embodied in that painting. Thus in his new book on *The Rise and Fall of New York City* he writes as follows:

> It would surely be overreaching to suggest that the spirit of nonobjective art forced New York into its financial difficulties of 1975, or that it continues to hold before the city the specter of other severe difficulties that it may face in the future. But it is not overreaching to suggest that when the institutional leaders of the city make modern painting and sculpture their most prized art form, and when they devote as much time, intelligence, and, not least, money to its pursuit as the New York leaders of the postwar world have done, they demonstrate a set of values that endangers those needed to keep an urban polity on a firm, reasonable, and safe course.
>
> . . . Accepting as a form of high and serious art an arrangement of colors and shapes that has no relationship at all to objects of the world outside the canvas inferentially denies the value and importance of understanding the relationships between those objects and the observer. It offers the viewer instead spatial relationships that relate the paints . . . to each other within the canvas and nowhere else.[2]

By this reasoning the turn away from abstraction and toward various modes of representation which has been the single most conspicuous feature of contemporary art in New York for a decade now would have to be taken as a sign that "severe difficulties," as Roger Starr calls them, can now safely be consigned to the past as far as New York City is concerned. But I doubt if he would agree with that. It is not, in any case, the merit of Starr's criticism which interests me here—in my opinion, it has no more merit than Fredric Jameson's—but the fact that a writer in his position feels compelled to make it—that is, to seize on modernism as the source of so many of our social ills.

Clearly the "institutional leaders of the city" whom Roger Starr has in mind are mostly named Rockefeller, although he never comes right out and says so. No such reticence is to be found in yet another writer who traces many of our social ills to the influence of modernism—Daniel Bell, who in a recent article entitled "The Revolt Against Modernity," essentially a rehash of the book he first published in 1976 called *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism,* speaks of the Museum of Modern Art in New York as "a satrapy of the Rockefeller family."[3] (One somehow doubts that Professor Bell would ever refer to Rockefeller University, that citadel of scientific research, as a "satrapy of the Rockefeller family," but that's the way it goes with the enemies of modernism. Which is to say, anything goes—even if a word like "satrapy" in this context evokes nothing so much as the pages of the old *New Masses.*) That for Daniel Bell modernism *is* the enemy we can have no doubt, for he had already confided to us in *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* that "I see Modernism as the agency for the dissolution of the bourgeois world view."[4]

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2 *The Rise and Fall of New York City* by Roger Starr (Basic Books, 1985), page 219.

3 "The Revolt Against Modernity" by Daniel Bell, in *The Public Interest* (Fall 1985), page 57.

4 *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* by Daniel Bell (Harper Torchbooks edition, 1978), page xxi.

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What makes the discussion interesting, of course, is that Jameson rejects modernism because it has proved so conclusively to be, in effect, a *coefficient* of the bourgeois world view. The Left rejects modernism because it is seen to be an integral part of bourgeois democracy; the Right, if that is the word for these writers, rejects modernism because it is seen to subvert bourgeois democracy.

Jameson is, I suppose, a Marxist of some sort—let us call him a post-structuralist Marxist. He is certainly anti-capitalist and anti-bourgeois. Bell likes to call himself a socialist—and, as we have seen, he does have a fondness for the old socialist rhetoric. Whether he is really anti-capitalist or anti-bourgeois, however, I have my doubts. Roger Starr has sometimes been called a neoconservative, and this is a position close to my own (at least on matters other than modernism and culture). Starr is certainly pro-capitalist and pro-bourgeois. Yet despite these differences in the content of their respective criticisms, such distinctions play little or no role in the passion and prejudice which these writers (and so many others) bring to this debate.

Now this is quite the most remarkable thing about this debate, and what really identifies it as marking a new development in the history of modernism—the way it has ignited passions and confounded all the old alignments. What we are witnessing is, among much else, an historic breakdown in the divisions which once separated radicals from conservatives, for instance, or the avant-garde from the philistines—divisions which served for so long to chart the course of modern cultural life.

As a result of this altered situation, the old terms have lost much, if not quite all, of their meaning. Those who pride themselves on being either radicals, on the one hand, or philistines, on the other, need no longer, at least on the question of modernism, necessarily find themselves in adamant opposition (as, of course, they once would have been). As for the champions of modernism—who, not so long ago, would have been universally regarded as the opponents of reaction—they, or I should say *we,* now often find ourselves described, and not unjustly either, as representatives of a conservative impulse. We are indeed in a new historical situation in which positions once easily stigmatized or praised as radical or conservative, avant-garde or philistine, no longer always serve as a reliable guide to the beliefs and commitments which govern cultural life.

How, then, does it happen that on this question the old alignments have so completely broken down, and there is now arrayed against modernism and its achievements such a vigorous and wide-ranging campaign of deconstruction and disinformation?

The essential precondition of this campaign was, of course, the absorption of modernism into the mainstream of American cultural life. Not until modernism achieved—and was clearly seen to achieve—its mainstream status in the academy, in the marketplace, in the media, and in our institutions generally, did it begin to come under the current critical assault. Virtually all of the earlier attacks on modernism had emanated from a fundamentally middlebrow cultural establishment concerned to defend and reaffirm its own legitimacy in the face of what were looked upon as upstart or malevolent challenges to its authority. These earlier attacks on modernism had failed to be effective, as we know—and largely, I believe, because they finally had nothing to offer as an alternative to the modernist tide. When that failure came to be widely recognized, then the way was clear for modernism to itself become the established culture, and that is what it did become.

This is a development we can date with a fair degree of precision, even if we cannot wholly account for the rapidity with which it occurred when it did occur. It happened in the early 1960s, in the Kennedy period, and in my view we cannot really expect to understand the current assault on modernism if we fail to grasp that it was in the Sixties that modernism first established its authority as mainstream culture. For both modernism as mainstream culture and the accelerating as-

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sault on modernism, which began in the Seventies and has reached a point of crisis in the Eighties, are together part of what the Sixties bequeathed to American culture and American society.

This aspect of the Sixties has been very little understood, I believe, for its beginnings predate the developments we generally associate with the Sixties—the emergence of the counterculture and the antiwar movement and the tremendous changes they brought in their wake. In our preoccupation with the consequences of that upheaval we tend to forget that the Sixties witnessed an extraordinary expansion in the cultural life of the nation, and that this expansion occurred largely, though not exclusively, in those areas which brought high culture—high culture as distinguished from popular culture—to a public larger than any which had theretofore been receptive to it.

We need only recall that this was an era that saw the building of a great many new museums and the expansion of a great many existing museums. It brought us Lincoln Center in New York, and many similar complexes around the country. It was in this period, too, that dance emerged for the first time as a mainstream artistic interest, and there were similar developments in other fields.

What has not been much remarked upon, however, is that it was in the Sixties, too, that the media underwent a drastic change in attitude toward the arts, and especially in its attitude toward modernism in the arts. We tend to forget that it wasn't until the Sixties that a living painter or sculptor of modernist persuasion could expect to receive a sympathetic response from the principal art critics on such publications as *Time* and *Newsweek* and *The New York Times.* On this matter I can speak from personal experience, for it was in the fall of 1965 that I was invited to join the staff of *The New York Times,* and the editors who offered me the job made it very clear that they now felt obliged for the first time to employ a critic who could be counted upon to be more informed and up-to-date about modern art than those they had generally employed in the past. (They had already made one or two attempts at this, but none had worked out.) For they weren't looking for a cheerleader, and, I might add, they certainly didn't get one when they hired me. But they were looking for a writer who took the subject with the requisite seriousness. As the then executive editor of *The Times,* Turner Catledge, explained to me (with something of a sigh): "Our readers are now a lot smarter about all this than we are." To keep these readers and win still others the managers of the paper felt it necessary to redress the balance, and this meant—in some fields at least—joining the modernist tide instead of opposing it.

To redress the balance—in fact, to catch up on the artistic and cultural reality of the moment—was very much what this shift in the early Sixties was about. Tremendous changes had taken place in American cultural life in the Fifties which were accorded little, if any, sympathetic representation in mainstream cultural institutions and almost none in the mainstream media. In the visual arts, for example, the New York School had established itself in the Fifties as the leading international art movement of the post-World War II period, yet it was accorded no recognition in such institutions as the Metropolitan Museum or the National Gallery in Washington. Even the Museum of Modern Art, which in principle specialized in such developments, gave the movement only sporadic recognition until 1959 when it mounted a major exhibition, called "The New American Painting," for the first time. There were exceptions, of course—a critic here, a curator there, an adventurous collector or two—but for the most part what might be called mainstream highbrow taste—elite taste—in the Fifties still favored French painting over anything American and representational art over anything abstract.

By the early Sixties there existed in this country a public that was large and growing which felt very keenly this discrepancy between what I have called the cultural reality of the moment—anyone who had been to school in the Fifties understood that modernism in one form or another was at the

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heart of it—and the paucity of its representation in the mainstream institutional life of culture. Out of an interest in their own survival and prosperity, it was thus in the early Sixties that these mainstream institutions set about closing the gap. How it was done, and whether the doing kept faith with the original impulse, whether something valuable and important got lost in the process—all these are questions worth exploring on another occasion. The point to be grasped here, however, is that it was *not* the institutional life of culture which initiated the change—the institutions responded to a change which had already occurred. They initiated nothing in the realm of artistic creation; they were attempting to catch up with and keep abreast of what had already been created and had already elicited a significant response. It was out of this situation, moreover, that the National Endowment for the Arts first emerged in 1965—as a response to a cultural development already in progress.

How this shift of modernist culture into the mainstream would have turned out if, as the Sixties developed on its headlong course, there had been no war in Vietnam, no rock music or birth-control pill, no military draft or drug culture or antiwar movement or Woodstock, etc., we are not in a position to know. All of these upheavals did occur—they swamped us, and we are still, in a sense, digging our way out of the debris which they left in their wake.

What, we may ask, was the fate of modernism in this historical upheaval? What role, if any, was it seen to have played in the counterculture and the antiwar movement and the sexual revolution of the Sixties and early Seventies? This, I think, is the crucial question, for it is in relation to the role assigned to modernism at this turn in our history that the current crop of modernism's avowed enemies has emerged.

By and large, and allowing for differences in emphasis and nuance, the roles assigned to modernism in the upheavals of the Sixties by its current enemies derive from two very distinct interpretations of what modernism was and is. The first, which is now clearly identified with the political Left, rejects modernism out of a sense of bitter disappointment and betrayal. (This is the position of Jameson and his numerous academic brethren.) This view may be summed up as follows: Modernism claimed to be revolutionary, it claimed to be anti-bourgeois, it promised us a new world, but it turned out to be a coefficient of bourgeois capitalist culture, after all, and we therefore reject it as counterrevolutionary and indeed reactionary. And further, since modernism is in some sense the only high culture which currently exists in living form, we also reject the claims of high culture and must work to destroy the privileged status it enjoys in the cultural life of the bourgeois democracies. Hence the new role assigned to popular culture as an agency of political deconstruction.

That, I think it is fair to say, just about sums up the judgment which the intellectual Left has made on modernism as a cultural movement.

It is more difficult to characterize the second categorical interpretation of modernism made by its enemies on the basis of its role in the upheavals of the Sixties—the interpretation which unites Roger Starr, Daniel Bell, and a good many others. As I said, Bell claims to be a socialist and Starr has been called a neoconservative. Lionel Trilling, upon whose ideas Bell and other writers of this persuasion so much depend, regarded himself as a liberal but was regarded by many others as a conservative. So what can we call this interpretation? Despite what I have said earlier about the fallen status of the word, I am afraid we must fall back, after all, on the term *philistine*—it is the one that will have to do until we can come up with a better one.

This philistine view, then, may be summed up as follows: Modernism was largely responsible for all the upheavals of the Sixties. What we saw happen in the Sixties was the ethos of modernism translated into action, modernism brought into the streets, so to speak, and enacted in every aspect of the sexual revolution and the whole counterculture.

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In this view, Woodstock was in some sense the culmination of the modernist dream of a society in a permanent state of orgy and ecstasy. Above all, modernism promised us the destruction of capitalism and bourgeois life, and the Sixties showed us just how subversive modernism could be if its governing ideas were acted upon.

But how much of the culture of modernism was it that dreamed of a society in a permanent state of orgy and ecstasy? In actuality, the counterculture of the Sixties derived from ideas which were deeply inimical to the fundamental modalities of modernist thought if we take the latter—as I think we must—to be represented by such figures as Flaubert and Henry James and Marcel Proust, T. S. Eliot and Wallace Stevens and even the early Ezra Pound, Manet and Cézanne and Matisse and Picasso and Brancusi and Miró and the painters of the New York School, Igor Stravinsky and Arnold Schoenberg, etc. It wasn't the works of James Joyce or Thomas Mann or Ernest Hemingway or Gertrude Stein which were carried in the rucksacks of the antiwar marchers, and it wasn't to the music of Stravinsky or Schoenberg that they marched.

Now the exact relation in which the high culture of modernism stands to the cultural upheavals of the Sixties and the exact relation in which the high culture of modernism stands to capitalism and bourgeois democracy are both questions of a far greater complexity than the enemies of modernism can bring themselves to acknowledge. The Left position wishes to delegitimize modernism for failing to fulfill a revolutionary function; the philisitine position wishes to delegitimize modernism by making it the scapegoat for social developments it regards as calamitous. Both, I submit, are based on caricatures of history.

That there has been from the beginning of the modernist movement a *révolté* element is not to be denied, of course, but it was rarely, if ever, the dominant element, and in each case where a group or movement, such as Futurism or Dada, allied itself with a politically revolutionary cause, it was the aesthetic component—not the politics—which proved to be enduring, and which came to play a role in shaping the sensibility of high culture in bourgeois societies. That, of course, is what is so frustrating about modernism for the ideological Left—that the principal achievement of modernism always turns out to be aesthetic rather than political. And as the Left has no way of accommodating the aesthetic either as a mode of cognition or as an autonomous cultural enterprise—both of which may be said to constitute the very foundations of what modernism finally represents—it must consign it, either literally or figuratively, to the so-called superstructure. But the philistine position cannot accommodate the notion of an independent aesthetic impulse, either, and so aesthetic achievements must likewise be stigmatized as ideological if they are to be discussed at all.

Something more than modernism is also being caricatured in these attacks—namely, the bourgeoisie, in other words, you and me, and the life of the mind in middle-class, capitalist society. Reading through this vast literature on the failures and/or crimes of modernism, one would scarcely suspect that bourgeois life had been changed more than a little, and by and large for the better, since Balzac and Flaubert wrote about it in their novels, or that the culture of modernism has played a decisive role in making bourgeois life a more liberal, a more enlightened, and a spiritually more spacious environment than it once was. The truth is, the culture of modernism has served all along as the aesthetic and spiritual conscience, and sometimes even the moral conscience, of middle-class life, and it is this which has made it pre-eminently the culture of democratic capitalist society, however many the conflicts it may still have with that society, and it is this which has made the culture of modernism so anathema to anti-democratic political regimes. Isn't what is really at stake, then, in this attack on modernism something central to the vital cultural life of our democratic society? Central, that is to say, to democracy itself? I think it is.

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Politics, politics, politics—the PEN Congress in New York

by Roger Kimball

Over six hundred writers from some forty countries gathered in New York this past January for the 48th International PEN Congress. PEN was founded in London in 1921 by Mrs. C. A. Dawson Scott, a Cornish novelist and poet, and John Galsworthy. It is now a worldwide organization of writers—"poets, playwrights, essayists, editors, novelists," as its letterhead explains—which currently maintains eighty-odd centers in some fifty countries. American PEN, founded in 1922, is a branch—by far the largest branch—of the international organization, with a membership of about two thousand writers. This was the fourth International Congress that American PEN had hosted, the last taking place twenty years ago, in 1966.

American PEN sponsors various prizes and awards, operates a fund to provide emergency assistance to writers in straitened circumstances, and helps to introduce foreign writers to the American audience. But, like the organization as a whole, American PEN fancies itself a "dynamic moral force on a global level." Its *raison d'être* is to monitor censorship and what it regards as other curbs on freedom of expression, and to organize protests against governmental harassment of writers around the world. The main instrument of these good works is the PEN Freedom to Write programs; and PEN is justly proud that its appeals on behalf of imprisoned writers have in some cases helped win their release.

Such essentially political concerns will naturally play a part in all PEN activities; but its International Congresses are also intended to be literary affairs, to provide forums for writers to come together and discuss their work and matters of literary concern. Indeed, a press release cheerfully speculated that the present Congress promised to be "one of the greatest literary events of all time." As it turned out, however, the focus of interest was not on the few truly literary sessions at the Congress; still less was it on the ten or so poetry and fiction readings that were scheduled throughout the week. On the contrary, the real focus of interest for the participants was on the series of highly publicized panel discussions that explored the general theme of the Congress. According to a press announcement, each International PEN Congress is "organized around a theme which addresses a pressing moral and artistic issue." The "pressing moral and artistic issue" to be addressed at the 1986 Congress was "The Writer's Imagination and the Imagination of the State." A statement of the theme was composed jointly by the novelist and short-story writer Donald Barthelme and the poet and translator Richard Howard. "The writer possesses or is possessed by imagination," their portentous statement reads, in part, "and life is generated by this imagination. In the final years of the Twentieth Century, the State possesses an imagination of its own; and *something* is generated thereby . . . . We

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suggest that these two imaginations are in radical conflict all over the world, and that such conflict is the most important issue facing the writer in the 1980s."

To what extent this statement can be construed as identifying "the most important issue facing writers in the 1980s" is a question worth pondering; one might be forgiven for thinking that the most important issue facing writers, considered as *writers,* would have something to do with writing. And it is also worth pausing over the suggestion that the writer's imagination is in "radical conflict" with the imagination of the state "all over the world." Is this supposed conflict as "radical" in New York or Paris as it is, say, in Warsaw or Prague or Moscow? The generalization expressed in Messrs. Barthelme and Howard's statement assumes as much, implying as it does a kind of moral equivalence among states "all over the world." But Norman Mailer, president of American PEN and chief fundraiser for the Congress, heartily endorsed the theme in his pre-Congress statements and interviews; and his fellow PEN officers approved enough of the theme to devote the General Literary Sessions of the Congress to topics like "How Does the State Imagine?" "Alienation and the State," "Problems of National Identity," and "The Statesman's View of the Imagination of the State." At the 48th International PEN Congress, it seemed clear, the term "literary" was to be understood with a certain poetic license: what it really meant was something much closer to what we usually mean by the word "political."

The over three hundred foreign delegates and fifty or so guests of honor (whose expenses were paid by PEN) began registering at the Congress headquarters at the St. Moritz hotel on Central Park South on Saturday, January 11. The "Special Literary Sessions," which included panels on translation, problems of the theater, literary criticism, and censorship in the United States, all took place in the St. Moritz; the more popular General Literary Sessions took place down the block in a ballroom at the Essex House hotel. I had planned to skip the opening ceremony, held Sunday evening at the New York Public Library, and begin my tour of the Congress on Monday the 13th, when the regular sessions were scheduled to begin. But an angry Op-Ed piece by the novelist E. L. Doctorow that appeared in *The New York Times* on Saturday changed my mind.

Mr. Doctorow was upset that Secretary of State George P. Shultz had been invited to speak at the opening ceremony. Mr. Doctorow was grieved at the State Department's use of the McCarran-Walter Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1952 to deny visas to certain writers wishing to enter the United States and at the Reagan administration's policies concerning Nicaragua and South Africa. More generally, he felt that a politician had no place at a writers' congress, especially in the United States. In his view, by inviting Secretary Shultz to make some opening remarks, American PEN "put itself in the position of a bunch of writers' union hacks in Eastern Europe who have gathered for a pat on the head by the minister of culture."

Mr. Doctorow may have had certain reservations about the theme of the Congress as expressed by Messrs. Barthelme and Howard. But what we see in his invocation of Eastern European writers' unions here is the assumption of precisely the kind of moral equivalence between East and West that stands behind the organizing theme of the Congress. Some such assumption, in fact, was so prevalent at the Congress that most participants simply took it for granted as a self-evident truth. But given Mr. Doctorow's insistence that writers should remain aloof from government influences, it is perhaps worth reminding the reader that the Congress was funded in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts—a governmental intrusion that, it need hardly be said, drew forth no outraged protests from the virtue-minded writers who deplored the appearance of Secretary Shultz.

As it happens, Norman Mailer had taken it upon himself to invite Secretary Shultz without consulting the board of American

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PEN (among whose members, incidentally, is Mr. Doctorow, though, as he noted in his article, he chose not to attend its meetings last year). Several board members shared Mr. Doctorow's chagrin at the prospect of being addressed by Secretary Shultz; but Mr. Mailer pointed out that the board had met well in advance of the Congress, had deliberated about the invitation, and had decided not to rescind it. In any case, according to Karen Kennerly, executive director of American PEN, it is a PEN tradition to have someone from the host government welcome the writers to the Congress. Moreover, the force of Mr. Doctorow's polemic against the Reagan administration's assault on freedom of speech seemed somehow diminished by another article in that Saturday's *Times,* which informed us that the eight writers from the Soviet Union who had been invited to the Congress would not be allowed to attend. Their absence was regretted but not especially remarked at the Congress. And as I had no doubt that the sentiments expressed in Mr. Doctorow's article crystalized the sentiments of many of his fellow PEN members, I went after all to the opening ceremony of this week-long celebration of writers and freedom of speech.

Sunday, January 12

Though the opening ceremony wasn't scheduled to begin until 5:00 p.m., the steps outside the Forty-second Street entrance to the New York Public Library were already crowded with writers and members of the press when I arrived at around 4:30. There were several handbills being passed out, including petitions against U.S. intervention in Central America and an open letter addressed to Secretary Shultz protesting the McCarran-Walter Act and lamenting that his appearance at the Library that evening compromised "the writer's independence from the state." The letter was signed by some sixty writers, including Susan Sontag (Vice-president of American PEN), the South African novelist Nadine Gordimer (Vice-president of International PEN), Richard Howard, the American writer Grace Paley, Elizabeth Hardwick, and, of course, E. L. Doctorow. Mr. Doctorow, in fact, was something of a ubiquitous presence in the opening days of the Congress: another one of the handbills distributed was the original, slightly expanded, version of his *Times* editorial, which was to appear in *The Nation* the following week.

Once inside the Library, I knew that whatever intellectual or artistic interest the PEN Congress was going to hold, it was at least certain to be a media event. There were well over one hundred press people bustling about: reporters and photographers from newspapers large and small, foreign and domestic, television camera men, journalists from all manner of magazines and periodicals. Literary celebrities, including Mr. Doctorow himself, were eagerly interviewed by the television networks. By the time the evening got underway, about an hour late, there were some seven or eight hundred people crammed into the Library's South Reading Room.

The atmosphere inside the Library bristled with a mixture of excitement and hostility. There were forgettable opening remarks by John Kenneth Galbraith, president of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, Dr. Vartan Gregorian, head of the New York Public Library, and others. In his keynote address, Norman Mailer boosted the theme of the Congress. He suggested that we might obtain some "purchase on the intellectual confusions of our times" by taking a "venture into the absurd" and considering the state as an individual organism equipped with thought and imagination. He also cautioned against the dangers of narcissism, warned that the nuclear arsenals of the United States and Soviet Russia now have the power to "end history," and enjoined writers to "return to the war and the play of words that will yet show our battered wife of a world some glimpse of starlight in the aesthetic heavens."

In themselves, Secretary Shultz's remarks were not nearly so dramatic as Mr. Mailer's;

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there were no battered wives or other fiery rhetoric; but his presence was the catalyst for whatever real drama the evening possessed. As he began to read his address, a woman rose, shouted "I protest your presence!" and left the room, followed by one or two other valiant souls. The rest of his address was received in a more or less sullen silence, punctuated occasionally by boos and hisses. At one point, Mr. Mailer attempted to clear the air. He chastised the audience for their "puritanical leftism," reminded them that it was "important to let everyone speak," and declared that he was "prepared to apologize personally" to Secretary Shultz for their unbecoming display. Grace Paley popped up several times over the course of the proceedings, wanting desperately to have the floor, but Mr. Mailer refused to recognize her. Indeed, on the issue of Secretary Shultz's reception, at least, Mr. Mailer conducted himself with uncharacteristic good manners. His own political position, as he was required to note frequently in the days that followed, is far to the left of the PEN membership generally; and he is certainly no supporter of the policies of the Reagan administration, either with regard to the McCarran-Walter Act or anything else. But he had, after all, invited Secretary Shultz to address them, and the board had voted to let the invitation stand; in his view, it was only seemly to receive the man with respect.

Given the outcry against Secretary Shultz, one might well wonder what sort of atrocities he uttered. Among other things, he described writers as "the conscience of a society." "Their freedom to criticize the state," he insisted, "is the true measure of their independence." And one gathers that he would agree with Mr. Mailer that viewing the state as a living organism endowed with imagination is "absurd"; but for him, this did not recommend the idea. Instead, he cautioned us about "the intellectual and moral hazards of personifying 'the state,' of divorcing 'the state' from its historical and social particulars." He pointed out that such personification can only encourage one to elide the real distinctions among states, distinctions that can mean the difference between genuine political freedom and tyranny. "It would be ironic," he reflected, "if intellectual freedom were appreciated only in countries where it didn't exist, and taken for granted—or even deprecated—in the countries where it thrives." He must have suspected that the distinguished writers assembled before him were specialists in irony.

The opening session ended with a press conference in which Messrs. Galbraith and Mailer fielded questions from reporters. Not surprisingly, most of the questions had to do with Secretary Shultz: Why did Mr. Mailer invite him? Why had he not consulted the board? Why did he not read the letter of protest to the audience as he had been asked? Why had he not recognized Grace Paley? The Congress proper had yet to begin, but it seemed as though it had already gone on forever.

Monday, January 13

There is something serene about Central Park South on a winter morning: the brown expanses of grass and leafless trees have a haunting, melancholy beauty, especially viewed from the noisy jumble of Central Park South and Seventh Avenue. Viewed from inside the Essex House at 9:05 a.m., as some four hundred and fifty people scrambled into the Casino on the Park ballroom, that bleak beauty was almost unbearably attractive. The General Literary Sessions that first day of the Congress were given over to the question, "How Does the State Imagine?"

Part one of "How Does the State Imagine?" got underway sometime after 9:00 a.m. The Peruvian novelist Mario Vargas Llosa chaired a panel that included Nadine Gordimer, the French novelist and Nobel laureate Claude Simon, the Japanese novelist and playwright Kóbó Abe, the West German novelist Günter Grass, and the American novelist William Gaddis. The format for this, as for all the General Literary Sessions, was a round-table discussion: Vargas Llosa

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made some introductory remarks, each of the panelists presented a ten- to fifteen-minute address, and then the panelists briefly mooted the topic among themselves before opening the discussion up to questions from the audience.

This first session was generally uneventful. Several panelists, including Kóbó Abe and Nadine Gordimer, took issue with the premise of the entire Congress: "The State has no imagination," Miss Gordimer stated bluntly at the beginning of her address, sounding a reservation that would recur often in the days that followed. Vargas Llosa's remarks were perhaps the most cogent and to the point. Reflecting on the place of art and literature in society, he put forward a view much akin to the view Freud offered in *Civilization and its Discontents*. In order to live harmoniously in society, he suggested, man has had to "mutilate" himself: to repress his most formidable but asocial desires and extravagant fantasies. The state is the political expression of that repression and, as such, is a "necessary evil": it protects us from ourselves. Literature provides a compensation for these repressed feelings. It is an arena where man's fantasies can safely unfold themselves uncensored by the demands of social life. In this sense, literature can be said to have a subversive function: by articulating desires that are at odds with the prevailing social order, it challenges the dominance of that order. But in many societies, especially in democratic ones, this subversive function seems to have lost its edge. Increasingly, literature has become little more than a form of entertainment. This is less the case, Vargas Llosa observed, in repressive regimes, where by definition free artistic expression constitutes a challenge to the prevailing social order. Yet while he lamented what he saw as the slippage of literature into mere entertainment, he made it absolutely clear that his sympathies lie with democratic regimes. In his view, the task is to preserve the challenging, compensatory dimension of literature without sacrificing the freedom and openness of democracy.

For his part, Günter Grass, looking grim and superlatively rumpled, informed us that both "state communism" and capitalism were exhausted as political systems. He had a few critical comments to make about the former. But no one familiar with Grass's political sentiments will be surprised to learn that, as usual, the focus of his animus was directed toward the United States. "Whoever still believes 'the American way of life' is a viable path to take," he told us, "has to be enough of a hypocrite to be able to ignore the slums on the periphery and the worldwide hunger." Slums, as it turned out, were often on his mind that week. He concluded by adverting to the danger of "global self-destruction" through nuclear war and—in a phrase that particularly caught Norman Mailer's fancy—characterized the contemporary literary imagination as caught in "hellish laughter."

The chief topic of conversation that morning, however, was not literature or the imagination or even the state; it was Secretary Shultz. As a *New York Times* headline put it, "Shultz Issue Dominates PEN Congress Sessions." Norman Mailer defended his decision to invite Secretary Shultz and even confessed that he'd found his views surprisingly liberal. Several members of the audience nevertheless voiced their disgust at Secretary Shultz's presence the previous evening. Miss Gordimer noted that she and her fellow South Africans had boycotted the address in protest over the Reagan administration's policy of "constructive engagement" as a way of addressing the problem of apartheid in her country. Günter Grass began his presentation by announcing that he was "shocked by the events of yesterday," meaning of course that he and his fellow writers had been subjected to an address by the Secretary of State. And as for Norman Mailer's call for good manners, Grass insisted that "we have to learn to be anarchists again," a prescription that won enthusiastic applause from the audience.

It seemed to bother Grass especially that no questions had been permitted after Secretary Shultz's address—though why

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there should have been any is a little unclear. There were no questions after the other presentations, either. But for Günter Grass this failure of Secretary Shultz to entertain questions was clearly an ominous thing. "Mr. Shultz is the only subject alive at this conference," Vargas Llosa exclaimed at one point with a mixture of bewilderment and quiet exasperation; unfortunately, he was only too correct. Yet it must be said that while PEN members may have been unhappy that Mr. Mailer had invited Secretary Shultz to address them, a better publicity ploy can hardly be imagined. In large part because of the controversy sparked by Secretary Shultz, the Congress became big news. By the end of the week, the *Times* alone had run some twenty-five pieces on the Congress.

Nor is Mr. Mailer the only officer of American PEN who is adept at garnering publicity, often while seeming to shun it. Writing in a front-page article in *The New York Times Book Review* a week before the Congress opened, Susan Sontag applauded the PEN policy of holding closed sessions. "One reason for cherishing the writers' congress," she explained, "is that it may be one of the last places in our current cultural life where the closed session still has some viability . . . . To have a context for one's remarks, so that they can be addressed to some and not others (not to 'everyone'), has become an endangered privilege!" In fact, the sessions at the Congress were open to the press as well as to PEN members. But, as Miss Sontag, vice-president of American PEN, well knows, the best way to assure that the Congress would have the requisite sheen of culture is to speak about "closed sessions" in *The New York Times*. And one also notes in this connection that PEN engaged the prestigious public relations firm of Lynn Goldberg Communications to handle publicity for the Congress and prepare elaborate information packets for the press who were invited to cover the event—hardly the best way to preserve privacy.

Part two of "How Does the State Imagine?" convened after lunch. Chaired by E. L. Doctorow, the panel included John Updike, the Israeli writer Amos Oz, Robert Hughes, the art critic for *Time* magazine, and the German writer Hans-Magnus Enzensberger. Like most of the General Literary Sessions, it, too, drew a full house of some four hundred and fifty people. Mr. Doctorow inaugurated the festivities by reading aloud the letter of protest against Secretary Shultz's appearance that had been circulated the night before. Mr. Enzensberger began by whole-heartedly subscribing to the sentiments expressed in the letter of protest and then proceeded to inform us in his presentation that the imagination of the state in the twentieth century was out to destroy humanity.

One of the most sober and eloquent papers of the session, indeed, of the entire Congress, was delivered that afternoon by Amos Oz. Mr. Oz noted his amazement at the "gulf" between the subtlety and sophistication that writers bring to their work and the opinions they express in petitions, manifestos, and "titles for panel discussions." Like Vargas Llosa, Mr. Oz viewed the state as a "necessary evil simply because many individuals are capable of being very deadly. Moreover," continued Mr. Oz, with a balance and wisdom in scant evidence at the Congress,

> some states are almost fair, some are bad, some are lethal. And since writers are, or at least ought to be, in the subtleties department and in the precision department, it is our job to differentiate. Whoever ignores the existence of varying degrees of evil is bound to become a servant of evil . . . .
>
> The tragedy of history is not the perpetual hopeless clash between saintly individuals and diabolical establishments but rather the perpetual clash between the relatively decent societies and the bloody ones. To be more precise: the perpetual cowardice of relatively decent societies whenever they confront the ruthlessness of the oppressive ones.

To my mind, Mr. Oz's presentation marked one of the three or four intellectual high-

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lights of the conference. His observation that "Whoever ignores the existence of varying degrees of evil is bound to become a servant of evil" is a lesson that many members of PEN could ponder with profit.

John Updike offered a charming and witty reflection on the modern American writer's intimate relationship to the postal system, especially as epitomized by the mailbox: how amazing that he should drop things into it, he said, and sometimes receive praise and money in return. Mr. Doctorow responded that he shared Mr. Updike's love of mailboxes, but was worried that around the corner from the neighborhood mailbox he would find a missile silo. Now, I daresay I am no fonder of nuclear weapons than Mr. Doctorow is; but they happen to have been a political fact of life for forty years now, and moralizing about them from the platform of a writers' Congress is as easy as it is irrelevant.

I was at first astonished at the number of allusions there were at the Congress not only to nuclear weapons but also to the possibility of a worldwide nuclear holocaust; at least every other speaker felt called upon to pay obeisance to the fetish of nuclear annihilation. Listening to Mr. Doctorow, however, it finally dawned on me what a boon to these writers nuclear weapons have been: what easier way can there be of accumulating moral capital? Simply allude in low, serious tones to the prospect of nuclear disaster and one has enlisted oneself in the rolls of the socially virtuous and concerned. Suggest, on the other hand, that nuclear weapons have become a reality of modern life—an unfortunate, frightening reality, to be sure, but a reality nonetheless—well, suggest this and it is concluded that one is somehow "in favor" of nuclear war.

A similar logic was evident in the pious moralizing about what turned out to be the two main subjects of interest at the Congress: United States involvement in Central America, especially Nicaragua, and the Reagan administration's "constructive engagement" policy toward South Africa. The solution to these enormously complex social and political problems was self-evident to most of the assembled writers: simply pursue a course of action opposite to that of the current administration. And it was further assumed that questioning their criticism of United States policy in these areas was tantamount to sanctioning repression in Nicaragua or apartheid in South Africa, as if hesitating before their liberal pieties meant that at bottom one were really an imperialist or a racist; such are the awesome certainties of moral self-righteousness.

One of the most revealing exchanges of the day occurred that afternoon during the question-and-answer period. Rosario Murillo, a poet and also the wife of Daniel Ortega Saavedra, president of Nicaragua, stood up to call upon writers to help prevent genocide in Nicaragua. That won scattered applause. But really: genocide in Nicaragua? Whatever one thinks of the policies of the United States with regard to Nicaragua, it is difficult indeed to describe the military activity there as constituting genocide. As Robert Hughes (who is certainly no friend of the current U.S. policy in Central America) responded, it is "only by the greatest perversion of language that what is happening in Nicaragua can be classified as genocide." "If what is going on in Nicaragua is what you can call 'genocide,'" he asked, "what then can you describe what happened to the Jews in the Thirties and Forties?" Rosario Murillo had no answer, of course. Mr. Hughes distinguished himself yet again that afternoon. At a press conference following the session (there were almost as many press conferences as there were sessions, by the way), there was some question about the role of intellectuals in modern society. Flippantly, but perhaps not inaccurately, Mr. Hughes answered that "the role of the intellectual in modern culture is to attend conferences."

That more or less concluded part two of "How Does the State Imagine?" My only other duty was to attend a reception for the foreign delegates at Gracie Mansion that evening. Perhaps the most memorable encounter I witnessed was between Mayor

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Koch, who maneuvered for fifteen or twenty minutes through the party shaking hands and greeting people, and Commander Omar Cabezas, one of the all-expenses-paid guests of honor. Commander Cabezas is the author of *Fire From the Mountain,* an account of his life as a guerrilla leader. He is also the Commandant of the Nicaragua Armed Forces and Chief of Political Direction at the Ministry of the Interior for the Sandinista Government. Mayor Koch chatted for a few minutes with Commander Cabezas and then asked him if he knew why Ortega, the president of Nicaragua, and his wife Rosario had spent over three thousand dollars on eyeglass frames the last time they were in New York. There was a moment of confusion as Commander Cabezas consulted with members of his entourage. "Well, things are very expensive in New York," one of his party replied. Indeed they are.

Tuesday, January 14

Tuesday's General Literary Sessions were "Alienation and the State," parts one and two. Susan Sontag chaired the morning panel, which included the Anglo-Indian novelist Salman Rushdie, the Caribbean poet Derek Walcott, and the American novelist Toni Morrison—well, I had thought that Toni Morrison was an American. But in her reflections on alienation she confided that "at no moment" of her life did she feel like an American. The audience sat in hushed attention as she delivered a passionate *J'accuse* against American society for the crimes it had committed against her "gender and race." We learned that "every law" in America has been enacted to disenfranchise her and members of her race and that the real function of the state was to create "humans," not "patriots," an abomination that American society was said to produce in great numbers.

This first installment of "Alienation and the State" was instructive in other ways, too. From Mr. Walcott, for example, we learned that "truly visionary writers" are not capable of prejudice. Dante, he said, was capable of hatred but not prejudice; it was a relief to discover that Dante, the embittered exile from Florence, was unburdened by anything so unsavory as prejudice. And Mr. Walcott also assured us that there is more "psychic power" in writers' voices than in "all the armaments of the world." In fact, this last sentiment, a kind of variation on Shelley's declaration that "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world," was one of the leitmotifs of the Congress. The feeling—or perhaps I should say the ambition—was abroad in various forms, but was perhaps best epitomized in the question posed in the official précis for one of the General Literary Sessions: "Can the writer attempt to insert himself into the place of the state, become its competitor, replace the state as the essential purveyor of values?" Fortunately, the answer to this question is "no"; the true "unacknowledged legislators" of the world, as W. H. Auden once pointed out in an essay, are not poets but the secret police.

The most illuminating moments in part two of "Alienation and the State" came in the exchange occasioned by some remarks of Saul Bellow's about the relation between culture and a traditional liberal democracy. Noting that the term "alienation" has become "part of the contemporary psychobabble," Mr. Bellow went on to observe that the statesmen and philosophers who provided the foundations for our democratic order did not make any particular provisions for government support of culture or the arts; that was to be left to individual discretion and initiative. The role of government, as Mr. Bellow outlined it, was to provide a structure that allowed for economic prosperity and fulfillment of the "common sense" necessities of life such as food, clothing, shelter, medical care; in this respect, in Mr. Bellow's view, American democracy had been largely successful.

These of course were fighting words, and one was not surprised to see Günter Grass come to the microphone during the question-and-answer period. Mr. Bellow had

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spoken of freedom, but Günter Grass had visited the South Bronx when he was in New York three years ago—where, he wanted to know, could that vaunted freedom be found in the South Bronx? Mr. Bellow's reply is worth quoting at length: "I was talking about the majority situation in this country," he said,

> I was not trying to include every exception one could think of. Of course there are exceptions. I was simply saying that the philosophers of freedom of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries provided a structure which created a society by and large free, by and large an example of prosperity. I did not say there are no pockets of poverty. I did not say this is a land of full justice. I didn't try to justify America as a superpower. I was simply saying there was no particular concern in the foundation of the country with the higher life of the country.

But in order to appreciate the force of Günter Grass's comments, it is necessary to understand that they stem from a deeply ingrained anti-Americanism that has its source in the view that at bottom American capitalism is not much different from, and certainly not much better than, Communism. Thus on the first day of the Congress, objecting to the appearance of Secretary Shultz, Grass blithely likened the situation in New York to Cuba or Bulgaria. And at a question-and-answer period at a later session, he asked rhetorically whether capitalism were any better than "Gulag Communism": "I don't think so" came his quick reply, though he subsequently denied, in private, that he'd meant that. Indeed, Günter Grass resented being accused of anti-Americanism, protesting that he was as anti-Communist as anyone, only he was also critical of some aspects of American policy. In fact, though, what one was witnessing in Grass's wafflings and contradictions was once again the assumption of a moral equivalence between East and West that is endemic to the Left these days. In his recent history of the modern world, the English historian Paul Johnson observed that "it is of the essence of geopolitics to be able to distinguish between different degrees of evil." And it is just this sort of distinction that the Left seems unwilling or unable to make. It is no longer possible to pretend that Soviet Russia is the fount of all virtue, as many writers and artists did in the Thirties, and so one must in some sense be anti-Communist; but it is still terribly important to be able to identify oneself as being "on the Left," and so one must continue to maintain an attitude of uncompromising disaffection, generally informed by some version of Marxism, toward the West and toward capitalism.

One result of this assumption of moral equivalence is a great deal of hedging. Günter Grass, by the simple device of contradicting himself, probably provided the most spectacular example of the strategy; and Allen Ginsberg offered a classic performance when he stood up to announce his animus against the Soviet "bureaucracy" in one sentence and then went on to speak of the "so-called 'Free World'" in the next. The crucial thing is that the Free World must never be referred to without those knowing quotation marks.

The Left's willful embrace of this principle of moral equivalence made for some rather unexpected recriminations. Thus William Phillips, a founder of the *Partisan Review,* was described in *The Village Voice* as a "conservative zealot" because he had thanked Mr. Bellow for introducing a "note of sobriety" into the proceedings and denounced the view, implicit in Günter Grass's remarks, that American capitalism was itself an agent of repression not essentially different from Communism. "*Conservative* zealot" —how that epithet must have stung an old-time leftist like Mr. Phillips! Susan Sontag, herself an expert hedger, insisted in reply to Mr. Phillips that "no one would entertain the preposterous idea that the United States is at fault for all the difficulties and oppressions and tyrannies in the world. That's not even a notion worth discussing." One might agree. But one wonders how far from such a view she herself was in works like "Trip to

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Hanoi" (1968), in which she confessed her "moral dilemma at being a citizen of the American empire," and suggested that North Vietnam was "a place which, in many respects, *deserves* to be idealized." And one notes that, notwithstanding her noble rejoinder to Mr. Phillips, Miss Sontag has neither withdrawn "Trip to Hanoi" from publication nor has she chosen to repudiate the violently anti-American sentiments she expressed there. Perhaps she has forgotten about such works, or hopes that her readers have—though in this context one cannot help wondering what place Miss Sontag would allot to memory and truthfulness in the workshop of the writer's imagination.

The current of anti-Americanism running throughout the Congress was perhaps most apparent in the reaction against the appearance of Secretary of State Shultz. Of course, the point is not that one must like Secretary Shultz or the policies of the administration that he represents; but the protest against him in effect set the tone for the entire Congress. And it is also remarkable that where an appearance by Secretary Shultz occasioned apoplexy in everyone from E. L. Doctorow to Günter Grass, an appearance Tuesday afternoon by Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow of Senegal, director general of UNESCO, passed without a murmur from these champions of free expression. Mr. M'Bow, one recalls, has advocated a "world information order" that would require journalists to "register" with governments—hardly a tactic calculated to encourage independent, critical reporting. The United States withdrew from UNESCO in 1984 because, as *The New York Times* reported, it discerned an "endemic hostility toward the institutions of a free society" in UNESCO's behavior under Mr. M'Bow. Britain, too, has withdrawn from the organization and several other European nations are reevaluating their association. In this instance, at least, it would appear that the imagination of the state has proven to be more sensitive to the moral issues involved in free speech than the imagination of the organizers of the PEN Congress.

Wednesday, January 15

Wednesday's roster of sessions included "Problems of National Identity," parts one and two, and "Censorship in the U.S.A." Arthur Danto, Professor of Philosophy at Columbia University and art critic for *The Nation,* chaired part one of the panel on "Problems of National Identity." It featured some very amusing reflections by the novelist John Barth on the relation between high culture, which is in some sense cosmopolitan and "trans-national," folk culture, which is often seen as the expression of a national identity, and what he called pop or media culture, which also tends toward nationality but is exportable as a consumer item. The Canadian novelist Robertson Davies, in inimitably grand oratorial fashion, urged writers to "forget about politics and politicians as much as possible" and get "back to your ivory towers." Mr. Davies was one of several writers who expressed disgruntlement with the near absolute exclusion of matters of literary concern from the General Literary Sessions; even Susan Sontag was heard to voice her desire that more attention be paid to literature in the sessions. Such appeals went unheeded. Instead, one heard numberless addresses like the one in this session by the German writer Peter Schneider, who spoke in large part about the threat of nuclear war and its impact on writers' imaginations.

In the afternoon I looked in briefly on the panel on "Censorship in the U.S.A." which was chaired by Robert Bernstein, president of Random House, and included the Canadian novelist Margaret Atwood, Kurt Vonnegut, Gay Talese, and the well-known First Amendment lawyer Charles Rembar. Since, as Mr. Rembar observed, there is essentially no censorship of books in the United States, the discussion (or the parts that I heard) focused on issues of pornography, publication of politically sensitive material, and so on. But back at "Problems of National Identity," part two, censorship *was* something of an issue. The celebrity on that panel was Commander Omar Cabezas, who read us

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a brief address about the struggles of the Sandinistas for freedom. In response to a question from the floor, the Commandant of the Nicaragua Armed Forces and Chief of Political Direction at the Ministry of the Interior (in charge of the prison system) admitted that there was a "little" press censorship in Nicaragua, but only out of necessity: "Right now we have press censorship to protect life," Mr. Cabezas told us, but insisted that censorship would end "ten minutes" after the United States stops funding the Contras. Commander Cabezas's admission occasioned scattered protest and some probing questions, but he was obviously counting on an audience of writers to be practiced at suspending disbelief.

Thursday, January 16

"In Opposition," the General Literary Session for Thursday morning, was chaired by the poet Ishmael Reed and included Grace Paley and the Chilean novelist Isabel Allende. By now there was a certain regularity and predictably about the events. Thus one was not surprised to hear Mr. Reed rehearse the evils of "cultural imperialism" and what he called the "literary industrial complex." In his view, oppression no longer comes so much from the "political state" as from the "cultural state," which is said to impose a narrow, ethnocentric view of standards on the writer. Striving to overcome the "mono-ethnic canon" of works and standards, Mr. Reed championed what he described as the "multi-ethnic" revival of the arts that took place in the wake of the civil-rights movement. Thus he celebrated "Black English," "Yellow English," "Brown English," "Red English," and so on. The only English he left out, I think, was standard English, though perhaps that was deliberate.

For sheer entertainment value, the highlight of the Congress was undoubtedly the impromptu feminist meeting that erupted in the Essex House ballroom after "In Opposition." There had already been several outbursts by women who were unhappy with what they regarded as their underrepresentation on the panels. The figures one heard varied a bit, but one could safely say that out of some one hundred and forty panelists there were only about twenty women. And yet women made up at least half the PEN membership: Inequity! Drafting a petition demanding redress was a sensitive business, apparently, for it was decided that the proceedings must be closed to men and all members of the press—just as well, really, as it was lunch time and one still had "The Utopian Imagination" to cope with later in the afternoon.

But on my return, I discovered that the feminist meeting was still going full speed—indeed, it had gained momentum, no doubt in part from the appearance of the venerable feminist Betty Friedan, who had assumed a kind of unofficial leadership of the group. The press was let in now, too, even the male press, and I ensconced myself safely toward the back of the room to witness the creation of their document. *The Village Voice* found it a moving experience: "In a process beautiful to watch, a committee of 100 or 125—stars and nonstars willingly equalized in response to oppression—*wrote.*" Well, one of them wrote. The rest shouted. Someone named Meredith Tax had the floor a good deal, unfortunately, and she was especially fond of screaming her "demands" into the microphone. "We've been 'outraged' in the second sentence," noted the woman who was taking things down when the word was proposed again. "Is the imagination of the state male?" someone else asked, hoping to get the question incorporated into the petition. "Do you want to move into abstractions?" came the reply from someone who obviously didn't. "How many people want 'hierarchy' in?" Even I could have told her that an elitist word like "hierarchy" would never get by. Sure enough, a chorus of voices and down came the verdict: "No hierarchy." The whole thing was quite a spectacle, not without an edge of hysteria, and reminded one eerily of those "sit-ins" and kindred demonstrations that proliferated on American campuses in the Sixties.

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What exactly did the women want? For one thing, they wanted "a humble apology by Norman Mailer to the women of the world," though I think that was later emended to something like "women writers of the world." More practically, they also wanted more representation on the panels at PEN as well as a committee of inquiry to investigate how the inequity they'd suffered at the 1986 Congress could ever have been allowed to happen. Nor would they be satisfied to have a meeting of their own: they wanted time at the final plenary session scheduled the next day to make their grievances public or they would disrupt the session. Grace Paley and Cynthia Macdonald were elected to bring their demands before Norman Mailer, and Margaret Atwood was also drafted, as a foreign woman, over the objection that, being of Canadian nationality, she might not be "foreign enough."

After all this, even a panel on "The Utopian Imagination" was bound to seem dull, but the women finally got their demands hammered out and disbanded until the next day. "The Utopian Imagination" was chaired by the American writer Arthur A. Cohen and included Susan Sontag, William Gass, the 1980 Nobel laureate Czeslaw Milosz, and Tomas Venclova, a Lithuanian writer now living in exile. Miss Sontag expressed doubts about the utopian imagination as it had shown itself in the revolutionary tradition but still held out hope for a "utopia of writers," a "community of consciousness." The most illuminating remarks of the afternoon, however, came from Messrs. Milosz and Venclova, both of whom took an extremely dim view of the pursuit of utopia. Mr. Venclova, who as a Lithuanian laid claim to having been born and brought up in utopia, reminded us that etymologically the word means "no place." And Mr. Milosz, taking issue with Miss Sontag's fuzzy aesthetic idealism, noted that utopians don't think of themselves as utopians. Too often, he said, even writers with the best intentions have provided a "smoke screen for inhumanity," through their pursuit of essentially utopian goals.

Friday, January 17

The last day of the 48th International PEN Conference had finally arrived. For the feminists, no doubt, the highpoint of the entire Congress occurred that morning when a photograph of Betty Friedan appeared emblazoned on the front page of *The New York Times*. The morning's topic was "The Statesman's View of the Imagination of the State." The panel of politicians and writers, chaired by Arthur Schlesinger, included the former Prime Minister of Canada Pierre Elliott Trudeau, former Chancellor of Austria Bruno Kreisky, and George McGovern representing the politicians, and the writers Mario Vargas Llosa, Kurt Vonnegut, and Frances Fitzgerald. Vargas Llosa's presentation was again by far the most cogent. Repeating several of the observations that he had made on Monday about the relation between art and culture, he noted that writers have no "monopoly on lucidity," especially in political matters: the contrast between the wise and humanitarian writer and oafish politician or bureaucrat—a contrast implicit in much of the discourse at the PEN Congress —just doesn't hold water. Indeed, Vargas Llosa reflected, he finds many, perhaps the majority, of writers in Latin America "very irresponsible" in political matters, even if they are great writers—think only of Gabriel García Márquez, whom Vargas Llosa correctly identified as a "courtesan" of Castro. It just may be, he said, that a majority of writers in Latin America would prefer totalitarianism to democracy.

Unfortunately, the politicians with whom Vargas Llosa shared the podium were not necessarily the best counter-examples. Bruno Kreisky, for instance, has made no secret of his support of both PLO chief Yasir Arafat and Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi. His speech was one of the longest of the Congress, a tedious reflection on politics and terrorism that brimmed with knowing invocations of Marx and Lenin, without bothering to pay even lip service to addressing a literary theme. Mr. Kreisky's performance, which was in large part an effort to offer

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excuses for Arab terrorism, provided the Congress with one of its most stunning examples of the practice of moral equivalence. During the question-and-answer period, the novelist Cynthia Ozick, among others, attempted to make some critical remarks about Mr. Kreisky's position, but she was rudely dismissed by Mr. Schlesinger. Günter Grass, as might have been predicted, strode to the microphone to defend Mr. Kreisky against Miss Ozick's allegations.

Mr. McGovern, who was described by the chair as "the authentic voice of decency and purpose for the underdog" here and abroad, gave a rambling talk in which, among other things, he lamented that Norman Mailer hadn't been elected mayor of New York City when he ran in 1969. Mr. McGovern also applauded Messrs. Kreisky and Trudeau as fine statesmen and opined that sometimes the "collective unconscious" of voters is not equal to the challenge of the election—apparently 1972 wasn't as long ago as one might think. For his part, Mr. Trudeau sensibly suggested that the really interesting question at the Congress did not so much concern the imagination of the state but how the writers at PEN had come to imagine that the state possessed an imagination. Why would PEN imagine the state as an organism, he wondered, alluding to and seconding Mr. Milosz's insistence the previous day that there is "no necessary estrangement of the writer from the state."

The final plenary session began with Norman Mailer summing up the Congress. Its notable success, in his view, was its statement protesting United States intervention in Nicaragua. Mr. Mailer took time to read aloud to the audience not only the statement itself but also each and every appended signature. He also made note of a letter to Secretary Shultz protesting that Margaret Randall, an American writer who had given up her United States citizenship in 1967, had been denied permanent resident status. But Cynthia Ozick's request that her petition about Bruno Kreisky be read or at least publicly acknowledged was simply ignored.

The real fun at the final meeting, however, was provided by Mr. Mailer's histrionic encounter with the contingent of feminists who had come to present their demands. In one particularly wonderful display, a teacher from the audience came forward to express his hopes for a world in which the "politics of gender" were obsolete; he was, he told us, ashamed of the "white male prejudice" that literature is a "male function." He also felt called upon to mention the "obscenity" of inviting Secretary Shultz along with representatives of Nicaragua. The conjunction—the "politics of gender" and Nicaragua—was delicious.

Mr. Mailer was not especially accommodating to the moralizing prattle of the feminists, in part because he felt that the criterion for an invitation to be a panelist at the PEN Congress should be literary accomplishment, not gender. Besides, he noted, there were nearly as many women as men on the committees that proposed the candidates to be panelists for the Congress. He then recited a list of twenty-four women, including Iris Murdoch, Mary McCarthy, and Barbara Tuchman, who had turned down the honor of serving as a PEN panelist.

But the crux of his impatience was perhaps better expressed in a statement appearing in *The New York Times* that morning. After the women had made their demands known, Mr. Mailer had been quoted as claiming that "there are not that many women, like Susan Sontag, who are intellectuals first, poets and novelists second. More men are intellectuals first, so there was a certain natural tendency to pick more men than women." This of course only further enraged the women. But the real issue is not whether Mr. Mailer's assertion is true; the real issue concerns his insistence that the only appropriate panelists at the Congress were writers who were also "intellectuals." Normally, of course, we do not think that it is necessary to be an intellectual to be a writer; often, indeed, there is the opposite presumption: that being an intellectual is a liability to creative writing. But as used by Mr. Mailer,

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"intellectual" was primarily a euphemism for writers who—indeed, like Susan Sontag—are most at home discussing politics. And it was politics, politics, politics that formed the chief object of interest for most of the panelists at a congress devoted to "The Writer's Imagination and the Imagination of the State." Perhaps it was the dearth of suitable "intellectuals" that led Mr. Mailer to conclude after the Congress was over that the theme had been a "great mistake."

The 48th International PEN Congress inspired many feelings and images. I found the image of a circus, for example, recurring with some regularity. But the image that sticks with me and seems most telling is that of a swamp: a lot of mushy terrain in which it was all too easy to sink. Not, of course, that there weren't patches of high ground; the contributions of Mario Vargas Llosa, of Saul Bellow, of Amos Oz, among others, exhibited a measure of reasonableness, integrity, and insight that distinguished them from the general lot of addresses and commentaries at the Congress. But mostly one witnessed what Walter Goodman, writing in *The New York Times,* referred to as a "community of indignation." Nicaragua was the chief focus of indignation, with the situation in South Africa coming in a close second. The feminist eruption counted as a kind of sideshow. The one thing that did not inspire much interest was literature.

In his exchange with the audience about alienation, Saul Bellow warned against "megalomaniacal" notions of the writer's influence on politics. The most graphic example of such megalomaniacal notions in recent memory is of course the Thirties—a great era for writers' congresses, most of which were sponsored in one way or another by the Communist party. At that time, writers everywhere were falling over themselves to express their support of Stalin, hoping to transform bourgeois society along some revolutionary blueprint. Mr. Bellow was quite right when he observed that those writers were "made to look like idiots." His comment brought to mind Roger Shattuck's essay "Having Congress," an account of the First International Congress of Writers for the Defense of Culture, which took place in Paris in 1935. The list of writers who participated in that Congress—many of whom were "intellectuals first," to use Mr. Mailer's phrase—made the roster of the 1986 PEN Congress look thin indeed: among many others were André Gide, André Malraux, André Breton, E. M. Forster, Louis Aragon, and Tristan Tzara. That Congress, too, was something of a circus, though given the times, the antics of the writers cannot but seem at once more ominous and more impotent. "If the literary heroes of 1935 could not band together effectively against totalitarianism in Germany—to say nothing of Soviet Russia," asks Mr. Shattuck at the end of his essay, "what can we hope for next time?" The answer to his melancholy question is perhaps best adumbrated by Karl Marx, the one writer who seems to preside as it were *ex officio* at writers' congresses. "Hegel remarks somewhere that all facts and personages of great importance in world history occur, as it were, twice," Marx writes in a famous passage at the beginning of *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte.* "He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce."

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The Saatchi Collection, or A generation comes into focus

by Sanford Schwartz

Art of Our Time is a grandiose title for the four-volume catalogue of the collection of Charles and Doris Saatchi, who live in London, but this collection lives up to it.[1] The collection, which includes over four hundred and fifty works by fifty-one artists, is composed principally of Minimalism, and a little bit of Pop art, and more recent work, which has been called Neo-Expressionist, or Image, art. This is work by, among others, Philip Guston, Julian Schnabel, Joel Shapiro, David Salle, Anselm Kiefer, and Sigmar Polke. The collection is a record of a shift in the way the generation of the 1960s and the present-day generation think about art—and about themselves. It takes us from a shallow-spaced and gleaming, smooth-surfaced art to an art of porous surfaces, flickering light, and a shifting space. It takes us from an art that prided itself on being immediately "readable" and clear—and, also, rather distant—to an art that is pleased to be ambiguous, that asks to be interpreted in different ways simultaneously. The past seven or so years have been a very free, undoctrinaire period for painting and sculpture. European painting is more innovative now than it has been in years, and, for the first time, the strongest European and American artists have a comradely closeness in their attitudes. There have been important shows of this new art (the best have been in Europe), yet no museum has presented it with the scope that can be seen in these volumes. And what makes the Saatchi collection unique is that the Saatchis have assembled this new work along with the work that, so to speak, fathered it.

There is something off-putting, though, about how they have gone about things. Charles Saatchi is Saatchi & Saatchi Compton, Ltd., an English advertising firm whose best-known client is Margaret Thatcher. Doris Saatchi is American and writes for art and travel magazines. They are contemporary versions of the Arensbergs (who collected the advanced art of the Teens and Twenties) and the Sculls (who collected in the Sixties). The difference is that the Saatchis aren't gentle encouragers, or enthusiastic appreciators, of the new. They are more impersonal, professional, and self-effacing. They have chosen an immodest title for these books of their collection. (It's peculiar to attach any title to a collection other than one's name.) Yet there isn't a scrap of writing by, or about, them anywhere in the four volumes; they never actually state what their aims are. It is clear, though, that they are after the major works by the leading artists of the day. Essentially, they want to be their own Museum of Modern Art, and it's astounding to think of two individuals having such an ambition. (Unlike the Modern, they aren't interested in draw-

1 *Art of Our Time* is published by Lund Humphries, London, in association with Rizzoli, New York. Each of its four volumes is available, in paperback, for $27.50.

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ings, prints, or sketches; at least, few of them are illustrated in the catalogues.)

This past spring, they opened, in London, a public museum for the collection, which will be presented in separate units, each on view for a number of months. The museum —its address is 98A Boundary Road—is made up of five enormous connecting rooms and is set on one floor, with some rooms stepped up. (The building was formerly a paint storage warehouse.) There is no seating of any kind, the light includes natural lighting, the steel girders are exposed, the floor is a painted gray cement. The proportions of the rooms are a touch too long, low, and spread out, and the space—the architect was Max Gordon—has a stiff and awkward but organic quality. At the first show, which closed in the fall of 1985 and was made up chiefly of works by Donald Judd, Andy Warhol, Brice Marden, and Cy Twombly, the building overwhelmed the art.

The Saatchis' catalogues are of a piece with their museum. These large-size but easily handled volumes are oddly official and ostentatiously plain. The texts, which are about the individual artists, are by numerous critics and art historians, including Peter Schjeldahl, Hilton Kramer, Rudi Fuchs, Robert Rosenblum, Kim Levin, Phyllis Tuchman, and Michael Auping. There are sensitive descriptions and perceptions throughout, and Schjeldahl (especially on the Minimalists and Warhol), Kramer (especially on Schnabel), and Fuchs (on Polke) are particularly good. Kramer and Schjeldahl have doubts about some of the artists they write about, and it is a tribute to the Saatchis that these writers have been allowed to retain their doubts. But most of the writing is not on their level, and the mere sight of all these appreciative-historical-critical pieces, set at the beginning of each volume, is cramping. Every artist is given a sort of art-historical pat of approval. The whole art world has been attended to and is reporting in.

In their desire to marshal the field of developing art, the Saatchis, one can feel, have trampled some of the real art out of everything. And yet they are in tune with a key element of some of the best work of the past twenty-five years. They are in tune with its confidence, its almost belligerent belief in its history and importance.

The first two volumes of *Art of Our Time* cover the Minimalists, and the Saatchis must have one of the finest collections of this art in the world. Here are choice works by Judd, Marden, Robert Ryman, Sol LeWitt, Bruce Nauman, Agnes Martin, and Carl Andre, plus top examples by artists who, older than, or not quite associated with, the Minimalists, fit in a Minimalist setting: Warhol, Twombly, Eva Hesse, Richard Artschwager, Frank Stella, Lucas Samaras. Many of the most influential figures of American—and world—art of the last two decades are here.

In the past few years, with the deluge of ingratiating, movie-inspired, and cartoonlike painting in the galleries and art magazines—paintings of angelic and heroic figures who float through the sky or dart through space like Batman—a viewer may have thought longingly about Minimalism, about how refreshing its cool, blank, uningratiating spirit would appear now. But looking at the Minimalist works in the Saatchi catalogues, and at the first show at their museum, I have to say that for me, at least, the time hasn't come. Twenty years ago, Minimalism was certainly the leading avant-garde style; but Minimalism lacks the figure, and so, in retrospect, it seems related primarily to landscape, architecture, and design. Minimalist paintings and sculptures have the same effect on me as Impressionist pictures; I respect them, but when I'm in a museum I have to force myself to spend time with them. The Minimalists are a lot like the Impressionists. They're both pioneering yet emotionally undeveloped movements. They are both about pure sensation: the look and feel of color, weather, light, different materials. The Impressionists and the Minimalists are portrayers of the classic norm of things. Both seemed arrogant to their first audiences because the artists said, in effect, "We're not interested in people, or emotions. That has been done."

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And Donald Judd, the pre-eminent Minimalist, reminds me of Winslow Homer, who, though not exactly an Impressionist, also painted the appearance of everyday, outdoor life. Homer is a superb picture-constructor. He is an artist of a clean cool breeze whom you like to turn to now and then, but he doesn't deliver a complicated message. He is strong because he avoids certain emotions. Judd is strong in a similar way. One feels with both that here is the work of a manly man, a kind of bachelor artist, who is, surprisingly, in love with style for itself—and who may not realize how stylish his work is. One believes that neither artist is aware of how much we are drawn to his work because of its sheer dapper elegance.

There is conviction to Judd's art of geometrical purity and sleek industrial materials —to his boxes that sit on the floor or are stacked on a wall. His color can be smolderingly handsome, especially when, in an untitled piece, he brings copper together with glowing red-orange plexiglas. He looks best when his entire range of work can be seen at the same time, when a viewer can get the look and feel of raw, dry galvanized aluminum; copper; polished, shiny aluminum; tropical blue and aquarium-green plexiglas; unpainted pale tan plywood. His most recent work—pieces that were exhibited last year and are not in *Art of Our Time*—adds a new note to his repertoire. They are large rectangular metal boxes, made of many interlocking units, which are painted in muted yellows, oranges, pinks, and blacks—varsity colors. And Judd has been a real presence on the art scene for more than twenty years. He is a highly competitive and—at least as a writer—a ruthless soul; he is devoted to the highest standards of creativity. In his art criticism (which he stopped doing full time in the Sixties) and in his sculpture, he stands on the field like a tough drill sergeant, impossible to please. His work says to fellow artists, "Can your work be this tough? Can you do it without laying on an ounce of charm? I did." Judd is, one can believe, a distillation of an arrogant, nervously self-confident time in American art: the era of the Abstract Expressionists and their admirers, who watched Paris decline as the capital of world-class art and believed that the torch had been passed to them. Judd's objects are the epitome of a purely aesthetic way of looking at the world. There are, of course, more than purely formal qualities in his work and in Minimalism. But to our eyes, now, they are buried and stunted.

Andy Warhol, though, looks fresh in the pages of *Art of Our Time*. He looks better than any artist of the Sixties. (It should be noted that the collection includes no work by, among others, Roy Lichtenstein, James Rosenquist, Helen Frankenthaler, Alex Katz, Ellsworth Kelly, or Jasper Johns.) As Peter Schjeldahl points out in his catalogue essay, Warhol was at his best practically right at the start, when he was in his early thirties, between roughly 1962 and 1965 (which is when most of the Warhols in the collection are from). Warhol was an original artist when Kennedy was president and right after, and his pictures are an expression of that time. The early Sixties were like a debutantes' ball for this country. It was a moment when the country took on a more sophisticated sense of itself, after Ike's sleepy reign, and Warhol was the guy who loved the party the most and was still high during the crash that came the next morning.

His pictures of the time are his most well known: paintings based on images taken from newspaper photos, which he silk-screened onto canvas and then colored in. Looked at now, his Marilyns, Elvises, Lizes, and mourning Jackies, and his car crash, tuna fish can disaster, wanted man, atomic bomb, and electric chair paintings present, with an audacious directness, some of the most glamorous and tragic (and laughable) themes of American life. With their all-pervasive silvery, metallic colors, and with bits of bright red and turquoise and yellow floating on the silvery expanses, there's something sleek and alienating about these pictures. Yet they're shabbily sad, too. Seeing one is like passing a construction-site wall that has been plastered with row after

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row of the same announcement for a long-gone event. Warhol's paintings are like Walker Evans's photos of street posters from the Thirties come alive, and the mood of that decade—of the Depression—adds a bass note to his art. Warhol was born in 1930, and his work is a kind of commentary on a Thirties sense of things. His most wanted men, auto crashes, and electric chairs have a Depression-era violence to them, and his idolization of movie stars has a Thirties ring to it, too. Warhol's best pictures have a layered power; he caught the spirit of his moment and of the time when he was a child. His being, in a way, a man of two periods makes him especially interesting now, because much current art has a two-decadeness to it. We are drawn to the look and spirit of the Fifties; we laugh even as we stare at the objects, cars, clothes, and personalities of the time. That era is like credit in a bank that we didn't remember was there. The 1950s are barely known to artists born between, say, 1950 and 1955; the era, it might be said, seeped into this generation's consciousness, as the Thirties seeped into Warhol's.

And there is a finality about Warhol's art. It is unlikely that someone would still want to base an art on celebrities, movie stars, tabloid disasters. Warhol wrapped up that material. We are probably interested in what lies behind the façade of modern media fame.

The real excitement and energy of *Art of Our Time* is in the more recent work, in volumes three and four, which show the painting of Philip Guston and Malcolm Morley, Sigmar Polke, Anselm Kiefer, and Francesco Clemente, David Salle and Julian Schnabel, and the sculpture of Joel Shapiro. There are many more artists in these volumes; the most notable are the painters Elizabeth Murray, Terry Winters, Eric Fischl, and Bill Jensen, and the sculptor Scott Burton. But it is these others who best represent the aims of recent art. They come from different generations and schools of thought (and different countries). And not all of them are satisfying artists. They show, though, the range of the new art, which is done by artists who use the figure but aren't conventional "figure" painters or sculptors; whose art is about the unconscious; who aren't "literary" artists but who are poets.

Philip Guston may be the cornerstone of the second half of the collection—and of recent art. When he died, in 1980, at sixty-seven, people were in the process of coming around to him; he was still something of a new painter. He produced a lot of work in the last decade of his life; it was his best work, and we are at the phase where we want to see more and more of those paintings.

Guston's story is, in part, about how he slowly found his voice, how he gave himself to different art movements, then broke free from them. He started out, in the Thirties, as a poet of social realism. He painted scenes of lonely boys in bed, kids fighting in streets; he showed ominous moments when people wait for something to happen, or play instruments. The pictures (most of which I have seen only in reproduction) are too artful and rather commercial. Then, in the late Forties, Guston joined ranks with the Abstract Expressionists. He became a painter of marks on an empty field. These marks—they're the size of pats of butter, and have a buttery texture—nudge and push against each other. These abstractions are subtle and sumptuous. But as the years wore on, Guston appeared to become frazzled, impatient with pushing marks against marks; the subject of his pictures, as the Fifties wore on into the Sixties, seems to be frustration. Then, beginning in the late Sixties, Guston began making good-sized cartoon-like paintings, and one felt he had finally come into his own. He seemed to bring together his early subject matter with the sumptuous touch he had created as an abstractionist.

The real point about Guston, though, is less his development than the depth and variety of his final body of work. Many artists create a race of cartoon characters. But Guston is the first whose cartoon art is genuinely challenging and august. From his lively recorded talks and interviews, Guston apparently believed that his subject was

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modern anxiety, and, on the face of it, his pictures are nightmarish. But Guston is great because he dares to be silly on a grand scale. And his painted world isn't barren—it is unusually inviting. His potato-head creatures, who are seen in profile (and with a bulging eyeball), stare manically forward. His Klansmen ride in convertibles; gather together and plot; whip their enemies. In some of his best pictures, the scene is a scantily furnished room in a city. There's an old wood door, a lamp on the floor; a window is open, and there is one of those shades on a spring with a circle pull at the end of a cord. Through the window are visible massive biscuit-colored buildings: the office and municipal buildings of any downtown. (We might as well be in an artist's studio.) The place is an American city of an earlier, pre-Second World War time. The characters are small-time hoods. They talk away the sunny, empty Saturday afternoon—at least, it feels like a weekend afternoon—smoking and playing cards. I don't think Guston actually painted hoods playing cards, but somehow you hear a deck being shuffled when you immerse yourself in some of his scenes.

If you look at Rube Goldberg's cartoons—the famous ones are from the Twenties—you will see the same downtown buildings, the same cars with big round rubber tires, the same rubbery people, even the same windows and window shades. And finding so much of Guston in Goldberg's drawings (and Guston no doubt looked at other cartoon creators) only makes Guston better. Part of the point of Guston is that his images and style of drawing, with big rounded forms and lots of thick black outlining, to show sculptural solidity, aren't his own. The pleasure of Guston's work is in watching him re-create the world using a visual vocabulary—the cartoonist's stripped-down language—which he didn't invent.

Guston is a less romantic, and a less spiritual, figure than any of his fellow Abstract Expressionists. He is different from virtually all other American artists in that his subject isn't mythical striving, or beauty, or youth, or sadness. Guston is a teller of macabre, what-if stories, an appreciator of the gross, the stupid, the corrupt. And yet—this is the amazing part—he isn't cynical or ghoulish. His work is hearty, vigorous, and humorous. He is the first American whose work stands in the company of Goya and Ensor.

There is a stage in the development of recent art that is hard to account for. How and where did many of the strongest new artists, including Schnabel and Salle, Polke and Kiefer, come to create their respective worlds of floating, overlapping images? And is this new kind of picture-making related to Guston's cartoon art? I think so—at least, for American artists. The relationship has to do, in part, with the sense of impermanence one feels in a Guston. He painted without set images in mind; he treated his canvases as if they were big sheets of paper that he could doodle on until he "found" images that felt right. In many Gustons, you see cloudy areas that have dark lines, or different colors, underneath. These flushed, often beautiful, areas are where a first or a second thought was covered over. His pictures almost always have a quivering, still-being-composed quality. Little is fixed in his world.

Little is fixed in the world of the new painting, either. When a viewer looks at a Julian Schnabel, say, he may find himself focusing and refocusing; his eyes may go from one image in the painting to the next, and as his eyes move the different elements become alternately sharper and blurrier. The elements can be a realistic image; a stylized and cartoonish drawing; an area of abstract brushwork; an actual object; a patch of empty canvas. Each is of equal interest—to the artist and to the viewer. Sometimes the elements come together, and tell a story; sometimes they don't, and the picture may still feel right. Many artists now draw, with paint, on patterned fabrics, or on photographs, and when oil is drawn over, say, a decorative fabric a layer-upon-layer effect is produced—a 3-D sense of things going back into space.

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After looking at these pictures, you may see earlier artists, even Old Masters, differently. You may find yourself "bringing forward" the backgrounds of paintings, and reading backgrounds and foregrounds as a sort of blinking, throbbing surface. The effect, or point, isn't only optical or formal. It's emotional, too. The marginal, "soft" stuff in a picture now becomes as interesting as the supposed center of attention. It is as if this were a period that wants to re-introduce heroes in paintings—wants to bring back the figure—and yet wants to show the not always substantial thoughts of these heroes.

The layering of Schnabel and the others might be called a development of Cubism, or a continuation of the collage spirit. But to our eyes the Cubists made pictures whose separate parts hang together, as if on an invisible net, and generally tell one story. Collage as the Cubists—and as later artists, such as Robert Rauschenberg—understood it was about an overall balancing act, a syncopated beat. When Rauschenberg, in the Fifties, brought together in a single picture patches of smeary paint, real objects (a tire, say), and silk-screened photo images, one felt that he was saying that there was beauty —or, even more, a pathos—in the jumbled (and frequently junky) heap of things.

Layering in recent art is more directly a demonstration of the way people think now —that is, with many seemingly unrelated thoughts and images hanging in the air simultaneously. That you take in these works by focusing on different parts doesn't mean that the pictures are merely painted versions of photographs or movie stills, or that these artists are the products of a movie-oriented culture. The relation of photography, movies, and TV to recent art is subtle. For some artists, this relationship may be there only slightly, or not at all. Yet the way images appear in photos, movies, and TV has helped produce a feeling for the relatedness of all images: images taken from book illustrations, magazine ads, studies of plant and animal life in books, even pornography layouts—as well as from movies and TV shows and commercials. Visual information itself has become a subject. It is a subject the way geometry, or modern urban life, or nature, or mythology have been subjects.

Fine art—museum pictures, art styles—has become a subject, too, partly because museums have changed so drastically in the past twenty years. The change is felt as much in museums in Santa Barbara and Toronto as in the Met and the Modern. If you first went to museums in the Fifties and Sixties (or earlier), you can feel that museums have become rather similar, in tone, to department stores and TV. Museums are no longer anonymous settings for works of art. We are bombarded, in museums, with videotapes, postcards, posters, slides, books, acoustiguides, and calendars about artworks and artists. There's a genuine hum of energy at museum bookshops; they can seem like the true center of life of the place. And we have become so used to seeing all paintings reproduced in color that many works of art now appear tame and flat compared with how they look in books.

Yet earlier art has not been devalued, and we haven't been made skeptical about it. We are actually beyond the stage where it is exciting to make ironic jokes about classics; Marcel Duchamp's having put a mustache on *Mona Lisa* seems insipid now. We have become more intimate with works of art. The figures and faces of previous art—the characters in paintings by Watteau, say, or Munch—now seem to be touchstones for artists to express more of themselves. In *My Head,* one of the most impressive paintings in the Saatchi collection, David Salle takes two Watteau drawings of a shoeshine boy—seen from the front and from the back—and draws them in a yellow-orange oil and in a soft, brushy way, over a background image. That image is a series of views, done in a black-and-white brushed-on oil that resembles a grainy photo, of quasi-abstract sculptures set on a table in a darkened room. (The other major element in this mural-size work is a stretch of unpainted plywood, with wood pegs projecting from it—each painted blue at the end—which is placed above the

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images in the bottom half.) Quoting from Watteau, Salle seems to tip his cap to an admired painter. There is some contempt in his attitude, too; he treats the Watteaus impersonally, as decorative grace notes, and implies that he could have borrowed something from any artist. Yet Salle also has an affinity with these figures, which are rather romantic. There is a gentle erotic charge to them.

An artist runs a risk of being jokey, or fancy, when he or she refers in a painting to an earlier work of art, or takes a Munch painting, say, and redoes it; but it seems possible to take a known image and, so to speak, inhabit it. And there is little difference whether that image is a Munch painting, a Giotto fresco, or a still from *The Honeymooners*. In the realm of images, Giotto is on the same footing as stills from TV shows.

There is a detachment to the new art. It is there in the way many of these paintings are made, and it may be an underlying point of view. In paintings where disparate images float side by side, or on top of another, and different styles, or ways of drawing, are brought together in the same work, the meaning may be that there are no connections between things. In continually referring to the past, these artists may imply that the past was more full, or real, than the present, that our identity will be complete only when we re-create the past. Yet the prevailing mood of the new art isn't sour or grayed; it is appreciative, sensuous, voracious.

One of the big differences between the current generation of artists and previous ones is their relation to popular culture. Popular culture used to be something an artist brought into his work in order to give it a jolt of real life; the point was to bring art down to earth. Popular culture is more ingrained now. A young artist may no longer make a leap from his or her serious thoughts to, say, a comic-strip, a TV, or a rock-'n'-roll way of thinking, where everything is simplified, intensified; he or she may now begin with such a sense of things. Didn't Jean-Luc Godard, in his movies of the Sixties, create such a world, where people were walking and talking cartoon characters? Godard was a forerunner, but the difference between his movies and art now is that his tone is witty, analytical, self-conscious. In his movies, everything is arch; every kiss and every murder is in italics. That self-consciousness is gone. Many artists now seem to feel that they can be most serious—that they can be most themselves—when they put their feelings in the mouths of puppets.

In retrospect, it can appear as if much of the new art of the Fifties and Sixties—the work of Judd, Warhol, Twombly, Flavin, Katz, Johns—was about transforming vernacular, popular art forms (and industrial materials, such as house paint and fluorescent lighting) into high art. In the years when Johns made his American flag paintings, when Warhol made Marilyn Monroe his subject, and when Katz rethought traditional painting motifs in terms of movie stills and billboard ads, beauty was imbued with a lordly irony. And Judd, Flavin, and the other Minimalists have the same distant, removed stance. On some basic level (which, over the years, we may have lost sight of), Judd's work is sardonic, even taunting. He is as aggressively tongue-in-cheek about aluminum and plexiglas and simple box shapes as Johns is about the American flag.

The artists of Katz's and Johns's generation came of age not long after the United States and Abstract Expressionism had become world-conquering forces, and their work reflects this. It's expansive, worldly. But it has the attitude of a son who takes over the family business empire and makes it even bigger, and yet is not altogether comfortable, happy, or satisfied with the job; he had the role thrust upon him, and he finds himself locked into perpetuating a family image that wasn't originally his. Not only is the sense of space in the work of Judd, Katz, Johns, Frankenthaler, Twombly, and the rest extremely shallow, but the works themselves push out against a viewer like so many shields. Each piece seems to say, "You'll get no secrets, no inner thoughts from me. I am my surface alone." Johns summarized an aspect of his generation in *No,* a 1961 picture

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of a gray surface, a sort of wall, that has a metal line running over it from the top to the bottom. At the bottom of the line is the word NO in stencils. The picture is touching; it is also bruised, angry, somewhat frightening. And its main point is: No, don't come any farther.

Artists now in their twenties and thirties have been inspired by the previous generation in their work, and have inherited its confidence, too. But they don't have such a masklike and ironic sense of things. They're more romantic and gullible and less guarded; they are also, expressively, less tight. The new painting, in its surfaces and sense of space, says, "Enter." This is where Guston is, again, very much our contemporary. When his cartoon work was first shown it was said that he was slumming. Here was an intellectual on vacation, the argument went, applying a luscious, painterly touch to dumb cartoon scenes. For many of the early admirers of his work, though, the idea that Guston was slumming—that he was ironic—didn't arise; slumming was an idea from an earlier time, when popular culture was brought into one's work coolly, or with a tone of daredevil boasting. Guston's new pictures were realistic (though I suppose we didn't think of them in just this way). They were "realistic" in that they seemed to show how people thought. A viewer might have felt, This is what it is like inside my mind—everything does pass by in this shifting, exaggerated, sweaty, nervous, heroic, mock-heroic way. Guston's Klansmen, his potato-head characters—even his inanimate subjects: his shoes and clocks—seem to say, "Am I a jerk? A genius? Will they get the point? Will they love me? Who could really know how great I am? I'm dying."

Guston showed how comic-strip art—and, really, any art—could present the feel, the texture, of psychological moments. Not psychoanalytical, primal, or disturbed moments; not the material that the Surrealists (with their bizarre, dreamlike images) and Giacometti (with his sculptures that suggest impotence and impending violence) presented. The sense of psychology in Guston and in younger artists is more something that's taken for granted; there is an equal interest in an act and in the motivation for an act.

Like Guston, Malcolm Morley, who is fifty-four, has been thought of as a link between an earlier generation and recent art. There are Morleys from every phase of his development, from the mid-Sixties up through the present, in *Art of Our Time,* and I can see why this English-born artist, who lives and works in New York, has been important in the past five years. Like younger painters, he brings together seemingly unrelated images, occasionally done on separate canvases, in one work, and, like Guston, he communicates the feeling that a painter is free to make a substantial work out of any image he chooses, no matter how wild. For me, though, Morley is important less for his actual work than for his presence on the scene, his example. I feel the same way about his work looking at it in *Art of Our Time* as I did seeing it in his retrospective in 1984. (It came to the Brooklyn Museum.) I left his Brooklyn show liking Morley himself: his gusto, his belief in art. He appears to be excited by the very tubes of paint, the brushes, the pans of watercolor, the sticks of charcoal. Yet his pictures seem to be mostly experiments in this or that way of painting. Some crucial element in them is unbelievable.

Morley began, in the Sixties, as a photo-realist—he coined the term "superrealist." His early works are painstaking copies of images of cruise ships and of cruise life, taken from ads. He also copied works of art; the Saatchis own his copies of Vermeer's *Portrait of the Artist in His Studio* (Morley's is much larger than the original) and of Raphael's *School of Athens.* On a theoretical level, these pictures were ahead of their time; Morley was making paintings about how paintings appear in photographs. But his photorealist works, when you see them, are irritating; what you are conscious of is the tedious job he gave himself. Follow his career and you see him literally breaking

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apart his early diligent art. Going through a Morley retrospective is a little like reading a novel. You see a man growing, stretching; he seems to say to himself, "This early stuff of mine, it's so tight and stiff, I've got to bust open." Over the years, the surfaces of his pictures and his images themselves become increasingly messy, loose. He opens things up very literally; he makes paintings, for instance, where those cruise ships are attacked by planes. It can look as if the very canvases have been blown up by shrapnel. There are paintings, too, where cities—and the whole world, it would appear—are going up in flames. The feeling of catastrophe and chaos sometimes seems to mirror the period in which Morley painted. In the late Sixties and early Seventies, he made pictures whose subject matter is riots in cities, busing, Vietnam.

In the past five years or so, Morley has become a vigorous, brushy painter of fairly traditional subjects—beach scenes, exotic places and animals, cows in a pasture—which he sometimes treats in odd ways. *Farewell to Crete* is an enormous collagelike picture; it shows huge bathers quite close to us, tiny bathers in the distance, and, painted to the sides, on top, and over them, large and small Cretan horses and statues. *Arizonac* is a fiery Southwestern landscape. In it, two gigantic Hopi Indians—they're much larger than the mountains—rush toward us, while on the ground, at their feet, is a speck-size Indian on a horse. And there are pictures of faraway places that may refer to Britain's colonial past. These recent works are more appealing than his photorealist ones, but the new pictures feel hollow, too. Why does Morley distort shapes, and mix very big and very little sizes? Why, in the Crete painting, is red paint thrown on top of the image of sky and water, and why is a trail of blue paint going around and over the Cretan statue? With another artist, these details might be parts of a flowing whole; when David Salle lets paint from one area in a picture run down into another we don't stop to think about what he means by it. But with Morley the quirky elements and oddities of painting halt us; we feel that they have to be explained and that knowing what they mean won't make the pictures better.

One looks forward to Morley's shows; one wants to know what he is going to do next. The main question about him, though, is biographical, not aesthetic. Does he calculatedly keep abreast of changes in current art, or is he on his own course—a course that happens to parallel what other people are doing? His real subject, it can seem, is being an artist. He always appears to be giving himself formal problems and trying to solve them. Morley himself may be more tangible than his work, but if he lost some of his respect for Painting his work might be more personal.

The revelation of *Art of Our Time* for American viewers is likely to be Sigmar Polke. This German painter, who is forty-five, has had three shows in New York in the past few years but is still barely known here. Based on the dates of his pictures—the earliest ones in the Saatchi collection are from the mid-Sixties—he is the first artist to float disparate images in one picture in a way that feels new.

In Polke's best work, he generally uses a bit of an ad, a poster, a cartoon, or a photo, which he silk-screens on. Then he subtly mucks over that image: he buries it under vaporous washes of color, he draws doodles around or on top of it. He usually doesn't work on canvas. He frequently uses sections of old, faded, inexpensive fabrics, often with ornamental patterns that probably come from—and certainly make us think of—the Fifties. Polke is like Klee in so many ways he seems to be Klee's heir. He resembles Klee in his wit, his venturesomeness with materials, the way he at first appears to have no one style. He's like Klee in that some of his works are so slight they barely seem to be there at all. But you don't think of Klee when you see Polke—you don't think of anyone. His work may be the most original any artist has made so far about Germany after the war. He seems to use already-existing images because he is saying that these images are all that is left. His pictures some-

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times feel as though they were the products of a post-apocalypse person who doesn't know what art is but has a desire to make paintings, and so uses, as starters, whatever images he can find—cartoons, ads, posters—and then, in a somewhat spastic and dribbly way, decorates them.

Polke is the opposite of Warhol. A Warhol bank of Elvises, or even a single Liz, keeps you at a distance, and that is one of the classy and best things about the picture. Warhol printed the images on the canvas and colored them in a slipshod way, but his pictures are the opposite of tacky. They're stiff, like icons. He says, "Look, world, these are the new gods." Polke wants a world without gods. He almost seems to want a world without artists. When we look at an individual picture of his we often feel we're seeing the work of many different hands. His art is almost programmatically uncommanding—even impoverished. Seeing his pictures in reproduction doesn't give a sense of their deliberate flimsiness. His marks can be very faint; his paint can be watery, milky; he doesn't always use stretchers, so the pictures can sag. He's not particularly fussy, and he works with very large sizes, but there's something private, veiled, evanescent about his works. He asks a viewer to get very close to his surfaces; you feel you have to be surrounded by the picture before its begins to happen to you.

Rudi Fuchs, in his catalogue essay, says that Polke believes he's making a political point by not giving us imposing images. We sense this, too, and the pictures become heartier when we know that there are philosophical reasons for them to look the way they do. Polke might as well be saying, "No more heroes, no more tyrants, no more logos." Isn't he also indirectly criticizing the overbearing, self-important quality of so much American art since the Second World War? His point might be: No more Mark Rothko floating squares, Barnett Newman stripes, Judd boxes, or Marilyns—no more chapels of art, with icons that we have to bow down to. I want this to be a world of fuzzy, fluctuating bits of this and that.

His *Liebespaar II,* a roughly six-foot-high posterlike painting from 1965, which shows a man touching a woman, is the single most startling image in the Saatchi collection. I am exaggerating, but this picture—it has not been in any of his New York shows—is like the beginning of a new consciousness in art. The painting seems to borrow from Dada, from Pop, and, vaguely, from Expressionism and Abstract Expressionism. But *Liebespaar II* is not a joke (as a Dada image would be), it's not a stylishly soulless picture (as a Pop image would be), it's not particularly muscular, or heroic. It is more like a melancholy and nasty meditation on life. It is full of disturbing touches. The smiling man, who is in a gray suit, has a black dot for an eye and seems like a toy—he might be the grown kid of the Dubonnet Man, dressed for the prom. The woman's features are more realistic (she recalls Joan Crawford); her eyes really look out at us. The image is like a date between two people with different kinds of limitations. There are dots, in different sizes and colors, painted over her neck and face, among other places, and it is the dots that make the picture revolting. There is something sadistic about the way her face and neck are covered by dots. We can imagine Polke first painting her, then taking a wormy pleasure in painting these dots over her. It is as though he's airily sprinkling her with a disease. Polke is not altogether nice. His art is sly, grim, and indirect—as well as beautiful and novel. This may be why he is still relatively unknown in this country and why he may always be an artist most appreciated by other artists.

Yet he has painted his poster couple with such care! He handles paint in the pure and quietly adept way that an old-time journeyman artist, making a sign for a tavern, would. And by fouling his woman—those dots—he gives her a personal quality she wouldn't have otherwise. That is the daring and original thing about Polke. He takes poster people and cartoon characters and fragments from photographs and makes them agents in a kind of psychological drama.

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Anselm Kiefer, the other important German artist—he is also represented by a large number of choice works in *Art of Our Time*—is Polke's opposite number. They have very different approaches to the same subject: recent history and their Germany. If Polke's motto is "Flippant at all moments," Kiefer's is "Heroically I take my stand." The slight difference in their ages—Polke was born in 1941, Kiefer in 1945—probably has something to do with the big differences in their tones. One half believes that Polke keeps up a frivolous tone in his work because, as a very young child, he experienced some of the actual war. And one half believes that Kiefer is determined to keep recreating the war because he just missed experiencing it. He wants us to hear bombs going off in the distance when we look at his paintings.

Not all of Kiefer's pictures are directly about the Second World War. There are pictures, for instance, with Biblical themes. But nearly everything of his suggests devastation or a swelling national harmony. In his many landscapes of fields and fewer interiors—they are of cavernous, burned-out public places—it appears to be the winter or spring of 1945. It is the last days of the Third Reich. Kiefer's large pictures feel enormous even in reproduction. Viewing them, we believe we are an inspection team; we walk through the rubble, or fly low over the fields in a small plane. Everyone is absent—dead, or moved on. But the sites are choking with different emotions. The earth is squishy, we suspect that there is fresh blood in it. We pick our way over burnt logs, piles of bricks. We become German. It is a heady moment. We're relieved that the fighting is over, and bitter at the waste. We have a secret sense of loyalty, too; we are sure that the victors cannot be as proud as we are.

Kiefer's paintings are mostly in sooty grays, rust-reds, earth colors, black. There are slate-blues and, occasionally, daubs of turquoise or pink. You can find yourself staring at a Kiefer for a long time. This happens in part because he paints—and adds materials, such as straw and wax—directly on top of already-existing images. In some of his landscapes, he paints on top of (and almost obliterates) blown-up photos of landscapes that are affixed to the canvas. In pictures made up of rows of portraits, he paints on top of wallpaperlike sheets of portraits, made from woodcuts. Sometimes we have the pleasantly weird feeling that the images are pulsating as we look at them.

The surfaces of his pictures are a mixture of the molten, the blotchy, and the blistered. When he paints on top of a photograph, the pictures can have a waxy, opaque texture. When he adds straw to his surfaces—he does this frequently—we get another rough, raw, and brittle texture. Yet a Kiefer generally gives the impression of something elegantly off-kilter and full of tasty different little textures. His paintings are among the most sheerly beautiful that anyone has made in the past ten years.

There is something that doesn't sit right about Kiefer's lyric beauty, though. A viewer feels that he has to tailor his feelings in order to enter Kiefer's world. You don't just drift into and out of these pictures; you have to take them on their own exalted-and-pitying terms. Kiefer reminds me a little of Rouault and Francis Bacon. Their work has a similar sanctimonious and jazzily despairing air. These artists seem to think more like novelists than painters; they want their work to be about the "condition of man." They impress us when they become known, because they take amazing liberties with their materials; they seem to invent new ways to paint in order to tell their stories. They are certainly involved with the matter, the stuff, of painting. Yet they seem to be above mere art; there is no thinking about form in their work. Their paintings seem to be based on a conception that they come back to again and again. When we stop being absorbed by the story each man tells, we are left feeling that their art is so much artifice.

This sense about Kiefer has grown on me after having seen a number of his New York shows. It's hard to have doubts about his twenty-three works in *Art of Our Time,*

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though. Even if he never painted again we would know his attitudes as a social historian and his themes as a poet. And there are some unusual Kiefers in the Saatchi collection—pictures which aren't landscapes or interiors, but which are as good as anything he has done. *Baum mit Palette* shows, against a dark background, a portion of a huge tree trunk which, though it's not realistically painted, has, in the reproduction, anyway, an amazingly treelike presence. Affixed to its center is a painter's palette, made of metal and painted battleship-gray. Its color and material remind us of war, and the image of a palette—Kiefer uses it often—makes us think that the picture might be an allegory about the artist's power, or ineffectuality. The painting seems to cry out, "Analyze me!" We don't want to. It seems enough to say that *Baum mit Palette* feels both new and like an image from a book of tales. It is like a portrait of an ancient, half-dead tree granted immunity from the axe—a tree in a prince's forest, to which an itinerant court painter, travelling through the forest, has affixed his emblem.

Three other Kiefer paintings—they are made up of rows of faces—are even finer. Two of the pictures are titled *Wege der Weltweisheit: die Hermannsschlacht* and the other is *Noch ist Polen nicht verloren IV*. The first two show logs, flames, and circular lines drawn over rows of woodcut portraits of famous Germans of the past, and *Polen* shows faces painted over and through a ploughed field, which recedes into the distance. These paintings present a less heroic —and, possibly, a more personal and original—side of Kiefer. We feel we are encountering a bookish man who might have been a historian and someone who, perhaps even from childhood, might have been in love with the swirl of personalities that make up his nation's intellectual family. (There are actual swirling lines of oil paint going in and out of the portrait heads.) These face paintings ought to seem literary, yet they're Kiefer's most abstract works. They are the works of his that most resemble the work of other painters of his generation. One wants to see them in the company of pictures by Schnabel, Salle, Polke, and the rest.

Francesco Clemente, who was born in Naples, and now lives for parts of each year in India, Rome, and New York, is a genius with his hand, a genius inventor of images. He first became known in New York with versions of Indian miniatures that perfectly re-created the minutely detailed, ornately colored, and smooth-surfaced nature of this art. Clemente also showed pastels, and they were even more impressive. They were in a class with the best pastels ever—those by Redon, Samaras, Cassatt, Degas, Miró. In later exhibitions, Clemente presented oils and then watercolors that were equally amazing as performances. They showed that, regardless of his subject, he brings out the special flavor of whatever medium he uses.

In his art, Clemente seems to say, quite calmly—and his images and mood are generally calm, no matter how weird—"You're not going to believe this." A Clemente picture is like the glass wall of an aquarium that we look into. Drifting by, and sometimes looking out at us, are people, disembodied faces, and, sometimes, little animals (rodents, mostly). Many are in the process of becoming something else. It is a land of oozy metamorphoses. Clemente does for the human body and its orifices what Chagall did for Eastern European village life and the romance of Paris.

The center of Clemente's world is a very short-haired, wide-eyed, and often unclothed figure who resembles the artist and who we automatically assume is Clemente. At times, he's unaware of us; he's absorbed by problems, we're simply watching him. At other times, he dreamily peers out at us, or scowls. He can appear as a sullen little satyr. We often see him from below; we're aware of his nostrils. His face is porcine; he is sensual and superior, eunuchlike, evil. Sometimes he appears in a shirt and slacks, and stands a bit sheepishly, his back a little hunched. In these images, Clemente captures a type we know from movies but have not seen in paintings: the modern Italian intellectual. This fellow

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is simultaneously stylish, professorial, sexy, urban, dissatisfied, and shy.

Clemente's art throws into relief the work of his contemporaries. He does instinctively what the others do in a perhaps more theoretical way. He switches from one level to another level of space—and one kind to another kind of drawing—in the same picture with the unthinking fluency of a mimic. In his fullest works, which are often his pastels, he blends fantasy images with imitations of children's drawings and of patterned decoration. Yet, so far, some core feeling is missing from his art as a whole. (He is thirty-three.) Going through the pages on him in *Art of Our Time* is elating at first. It's a barrage of fascinating, lewd, and amusing dream images, done in startlingly bright and perfumy soft colors. But I don't carry away a lot; there is something neutralized in his vision.

Clemente may want to produce a kind of pacified state in the viewer. He seems to think like an Indian artist; some of his images derive from Indian art, and the cosmic space that his figures swirl in feels Indian. And his art has the same effect on me as Indian miniatures, which are phenomenally beautiful, but always beautiful in the same way. After seeing a number of them, my mind wanders. Clemente's art is like Indian miniatures, too, in that, no matter what the actual size of his pictures, they have more impact when seen in a book. The sensuous and decorative beauty that he is after somehow comes across best in a small format and when a viewer is in private contact with it. Clemente has spoken of his love of William Blake, and, like Blake, he makes certain work specifically for books, often to accompany a text (he has collaborated with Allen Ginsberg).

Yet Clemente isn't simply a European who works out of an affinity for Eastern art and thought. The resignation that is felt in his art comes from him personally; it is felt in many Western artists now. Clemente merely takes it further than anyone else. Without intending to do so, he gives us the dilemma—as well as the mind—of a mimic. We see an artist whose hand is effortlessly capable of reproducing any effect or known style, and we see the sense of inner void that can underlie that talent.

For the past five years or so, Julian Schnabel and—to a lesser extent—David Salle have been the foremost new artists in New York. They are the American masters of the floating, layered vision, and, at least from what has been shown in New York, no European matches them. Until very recently, their pictures have seemed superficially alike, and Salle has been somewhat overshadowed by Schnabel. Salle's pictures are lighter in tone, subtler in their emotions, more restrained and indirect. He has perfected one of the central formal ideas of recent art: the contrast of elements. Many of his pictures are composed of juxtapositions of scenes painted with a dry brush, in shades of gray, with scenes painted in oil in rich, full colors. Sometimes he contrasts his filmy, grayish scenes with vignettelike images, or actual objects, or words. Almost everything he does has a one-two structure, a play of color against colorlessness, coolness against heat, intangibility against graspableness, memory against the present.

Schnabel doesn't dwarf Salle—or Guston, Kiefer, or Polke. But Schnabel, who is thirty-four, seems to have in him something of everyone else. He is exciting because he seems to come from nowhere and to obey no rules. He is obviously aware of twentieth-century art and its theories, and his painting is indebted to earlier figures, but one feels that the weight of twentieth-century thought has been lifted from him. His work has, if anything, a nineteenth-century—and a European, rather than American—appearance. He often affixes antlers, chains, or pieces of broken crockery to his paintings, and paints on velvet, pinto-pony hides, pieces of flannel—even on Oriental carpets. His pictures have an air of King Ludwig's Bavarian castles. These nineteenth-century castles are conglomerations of previous styles: Byzantine, Gothic, Moorish, and Louis XIV, with elements of Alpine hunting lodges and

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Mediterranean grottoes blended in. Schnabel's paintings are also concoctions of old and new art, and they are also lush and luxurious, beckoning and charming—and, at times, heavy and musty. Most of his pictures include figures and faces but some are abstract. They are about ambition, strength, and, one can feel, broken strength. They often show wrestlers, warriors, saints, powerful babies, muscular men whose eyes are shadowed and sunk in and, so they appear, stern men with big plans, big-time losers.

Schnabel's pictures have a distinctive scale. They aren't bigger, in general, than other artists' pictures; but he has a natural feeling for a boxy, squarish format, and his forms often have an attractive lumbering quality. A viewer sometimes feels with a Schnabel that he is encountering a single large protruding form, and that the sides of his pictures count for relatively little (whereas in a Salle every element seems to be smoothly and adroitly going out to you and pulling back from you at the same time).

Schnabel is a more exuberant, giving—and also bullying—talent than Salle, or Polke. We can be surprised by these painters, but we know their minds; at least, we think we know the problems they have set for themselves. With Schnabel I am often in a position where I love a work but have no sense that he will return to its type and build on it. I especially don't know what he's driving at in his abstract pictures. Sometimes it seems that they are made out of bravado alone—that he'll walk up to a canvas (or piece of velvet) and forge ahead with whatever comes into his mind at the moment.

Yet Schnabel's abstractions, which are often of flat shapes, are some of his best works. Schnabel is often at his most mysterious and inventive when he brushes the paint on in odd, sprawling shapes. They are interesting shapes; they are like the shadows of creatures that are part human, part vegetable. We seem to be watching something swaddled that is squawking and about to tear itself apart. That Schnabel goes back and forth between abstractions and pictures with figures and faces in them can be taken as a sign that he is torn between the two. Or perhaps he is saying that the distinction between abstraction and representation has become virtually meaningless. And there is another layer of meaning to his abstractions. The shapes in them often seem to be shadows, or remnants, and in this they are about what abstraction has become: a memory of something once powerful.

The twenty-five Schnabel paintings in the Saatchi collection—it is a top-notch group—are dated 1977-78 to 1983. There is wonderful variety to them. No one "Schnabel look" emerges. But there is a built-in set of problems to his overall approach, and it has materialized in more recent work. He seems to want to systematically go against all conventions, and this has taken him into some long unexplored types of pictures, such as crucifixions. He has had to paint faces, real faces with features, and his faces haven't been successful. They feel made up; they're ghoulish and ugly. When the faces in a Schnabel are too fleshed out (as they were in many of the pictures in his 1985 New York show), the whole work tends to become heavy, inert. So far, Schnabel clicks when he paints figures and faces with a few quick lines. There is an unexpected unity between the lathered-up surfaces of his pictures, and their baronial sizes, and the doodlelike figures and faces that pop out of them.

One of the best Schnabels in the Saatchi collection, though, has one of these coarsely drawn, anonymous faces in it. *Pre History: Glory, Honor, Privilege and Poverty* (his titles are generally on the windy side) shows, floating next to one another, one of those faces; a male baby, who points his finger; and a simple line drawing of an upside-down Eskimo-type man. There is also what looks like an enormous pear with a knife beside it. *Pre History* is on pony skin, and it is primarily a black-and-white, tan, brown, yellow, and dark green picture, with lots of antlers stuck on it. It has the colors and flavor of an Adirondack "camp," one of those rustic retreats made for a millionaire eighty years ago. For some reason, the man's face in *Pre History*—it is Big Brotherish—works. Maybe because

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the picture seems to be a page scrambled from history, anthropology, and art-history textbooks.

Schnabel is one of the warmest talents in American painting ever. The warmth is in his feeling for color, for textures. His color isn't easily labeled; he doesn't stylize color around a few chords, as Kiefer does. He doesn't, like Salle, play hot color off cool grays. He isn't, like Clemente, a master of a rainbow range of equally intense bright and dark colors. Schnabel likes colors to glow. He may have been prompted to paint on velvet because it is a no-no; but he may also have been drawn to it because bright colors shimmer on velvet. When he affixes broken plates and cups to his thick oil surfaces, the effect is voluptuous, especially when a work is seen from a few feet away or in a reproduction. Schnabel's color and touch are comforting, hearthlike, rousing.

The sculptor Joel Shapiro is one of the links between Judd and Schnabel—between an uncompromising formalist and, it would seem, an egoist who says that there are no more rules. Shapiro, who creates vaguely puppetlike figures seen in awkward positions, isn't, at first sight, a commanding figure; his pieces can be slight, and they aren't, in size or appearance, "important" or monumental. Yet he is one of the central figures in recent art. Like Polke, he straddles two points of view. Polke came up from Pop art and transformed it; Shapiro has done the same for Minimalism, and in this he also resembles the Saatchis themselves. His evolution parallels theirs as collectors. One feels that they collect Minimalist art (and the work of other artists of that generation) with a sense of respect; but they seem closer to, more at ease with, the work of Guston and the younger artists.

Shapiro became known for working with theatrically small sizes and for bringing recognizable images into sculpture at a time—the early Seventies—when most serious sculpture was abstract, or a work of Earth art, or Process art. Some of his early pieces (virtually everything of his is untitled) were of a chair or of a house. These primitively simple pieces, often done in cast iron, were like images of the idea of "chair" or "house." They were about three or five inches high and were placed without pedestals on the gallery floor. Later pieces were abstract but referred in some way to a house, a shelter, a fortified place. His work has been getting bigger in size, more recognizably of the figure, and better. Most of it is made from wood beams, then cast into bronze. His figures are like the woodblock sculpture that children make in shop classes. A Shapiro might be called a child's sculpture that, because of the way the parts fit together and the way the piece is placed on the floor, has been given an inner life.

His figures are generally of a lone man. These figures don't have faces; some don't even have heads. And their arms have no hands; the beams are simply cut off. Yet by angling this "arm" beam to this "torso" beam in such a way, Shapiro creates figures that seem enveloped in a thought, a state of feeling. He takes a few blocks, makes out of them a torso, a head, and arms, then turns this "figure" on its side—and we have, say, a sleeping person. But not only sleeping: Shapiro makes it appear as though this figure were also lonely, restless, wiped out. His finest pieces are often painted wood figures. (None of these are in *Art of Our Time.*) His color—he has used, among others, a red-black and a nighttime blue—can seem arbitrary, mental, fanciful; yet it is put on in such a way that you feel as though the wood were blushing this particular color.

Shapiro's sculpture would enhance pictures by Kiefer, Schnabel, and the rest if they were placed together in an exhibition (and vice versa). His pieces, too, are composites; he is a joiner, not a carver or a modeler And his sculpture recalls a lot of other sculpture: De Stijl and Russian Constructivism and American folk-art toys; the sculpture of William King and the figures in the work of the early twentieth-century English painter David Bomberg.

Shapiro's pieces are so many literal and formal balancing acts. They're emotional balancing acts, too, and this is what makes

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his work an emblem for the new art. What he's juggling, on the face of it, are different attitudes about his artistic past. He began as a quasi-Minimalist—or, certainly, when Minimalism was the challenging style—and whether his subject is a house set by itself on a floor, or a figure balancing on one leg, his geometrically rigid forms recall that style. A viewer can feel that Shapiro is afraid to move on from a Minimalist aesthetic; Judd seems to be breathing down on him. At other times, he's like someone who remains at a declining institution out of sympathy for it and a desire to give it new blood. Sometimes he seems to toy with, to ridicule Minimalism. And, at times, you believe he's not interested in Minimalism at all. He seems beyond it; he is in competition with the great works of figurative sculpture of all periods.

Shapiro's work evokes many separate emotions. An individual figure of his can seem, moment by moment, despondent, hesitant, pugnacious—or powerfully assured. His figures seem to have a troubled awareness of how self-absorbed they are. His work may come to represent the spirit of the present time.

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Poems *by Daniel Mark Epstein & Donald Justice*

From "Homage to Mallarmé"

Author's Note: These selections were inspired by the prose poems "Plainte d'automne" and "Frisson d'hiver" by Stéphane Mallarmé. Though my lyrics draw upon themes and images from the French, they are written in fairly strict meter for which Mallarmé could not be held responsible. Yet the poems owe their life to Mallarmé to whose spirit they are humbly dedicated. They are presented as homage rather than imitation or interpretation of Mallarmé's poems.

The barrel organ

Since my Vivian left me
to fly to another star—
Orion was it, Altair,
or the pale emerald, Venus?
—I have loved being alone.

All day I sit alone, but
for the cat, and one poet
of the Latin decadence.
Since my woman has gone
I love the legends of autumn:

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slow days of September,
autumn's prologue, the hour
the sun rests before it goes,
when rays copper the walls
and redden the windowpanes;

the slowly fading echoes
of the last hours of Rome,
those languid poems that come
before Barbarian cries
and stammering Christian prose.

I was deep in one of those
I love, whose patches of rouge
thrill me more than the rose
flesh of a budding girl, and
plunging an idle finger

into the cat's black fur
I heard outside my window
the melancholy singing
of a barrel organ. Under
the tree whose leaves in spring

seem dreary since Vivian
passed by for the last time,
I heard the sorrowful engine
that turns dreams to despair.
Then I heard it murmuring

some cheerful, vulgar reprise
that once made the back streets gay.
Yet the tune reached into my soul
and called the tears to my eyes
as no ballad has ever done.

I sipped at that song like wine
and would not go to the window
to send down my coin ringing
for fear I might see the organ
was not alone in its singing.

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Old times

Spiderwebs on the casement,
the wardrobe is ancient too,
fading curtains, peeling chairs,
nothing you own is new.

Didn't you wish, my sister,
with a glance at time vanishing,
my poems might set in meter
"the grace of some fading thing?"

New objects displease us
and scare us with their cries;
their need to be worn out
taxes our energies.

Come close that German almanac,
the days it proclaims are dead.
Lie down on the threadbare carpet,
calm child, pillow my head

on your knees in that faded gown
and I will talk on and on
of old clocks and cracked furniture
till the fields and streets are gone

under the cold of night.
Are your thoughts wandering?
On top of the casement
spiderwebs are shivering.

—Daniel Mark Epstein

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Piano lessons: a memoir of the Thirties

So now it is vain for the singer to burst into clamor
With the great black piano appassionato. The glamour
Of childish days is upon me . . .
—D. H. Lawrence

1: It was a kind and northern face: Mrs. Snow

Busts of the great composers
Glimmer in niches,
pale stars—
and Mrs. Snow
Towers above her pupils like an alp,
An avalanche threatening sudden
Unasked-for kindnesses.
Exiled, alone,
She does not quite complain,
But only sighs and looks off elsewhere,
Regretting the Symphony, perhaps.
In dreams, though,
The new palms of the yard,
The one brilliant flame-tree
Change back into the elms and maples
Of old, decaying streets.
—The inadequate floor quakes
With the effort of her rising.
The great legs, swollen and empurpled,
Can hardly support the hugeness
Of her need.
And if
They do not understand—her friends—
She has, in any case, the artistic
Temperament,
which isolates—
And saves!

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Dust motes
Among the Chinese jars. Etchings
Of Greece and Rome. The photograph
Of Mrs. Eddy.
Brown sky, so old,
Fading above them all.

2: Busted dreams: Mrs. L.

The mother's flaring skirt
Matches the daughter's.
Today
They demonstrate the foxtrot,
Gliding across the living room
And back, each time avoiding with
The same heart-stopping little swoop
or dip
The shabby, cloth-draped, pushed-back
Suddenly looming sofa.
On the piano top,
A nest of souvenirs:
paper
Flowers, old programs, a broken fan,
Like a bird's broken wing.
—And sometimes Mr. L. himself
Returns, compulsive, like a dream.
He brings
Real flowers. Thin,
Demanding, his voice soars after dark
In the old opera between them;
But no one sees the blows, only
An occasional powdered bruise,
Genteel. Does he come all the way from
Cuba each time for this?
The children
Are loosed upon the neighborhood
To wander. In the summer-idle
Schoolyard they are the last ghosts
Of the swings.

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Nine o'clock, ten o'clock.
Susurrus of evenings.
The moon . . .

Tomorrow,
On the Havana ferryboat again,
A little, overneat man at the rails,
Examining the waves, his nails.
And she,
Plunging the stiff comb suddenly deep
Into her hair, will turn to greet
Some half-forgotten pupil at the door.

3: The tropics: Mrs. K.

Four or five o'clock.
Late summer
Around us like a cocoon,
Gauzy and intimate.
—Sometimes she will succumb
To the passion of a nocturne,
And the fury of the climax
Ascends then through the folds
Of secret and abandoned flesh
Into those bitten finger-ends
That press from the unsuspecting keys
A certain exaltation—
dying away at last
Into some long fermata.

(Satisfaction. The brief
And inward smile.)
Meanwhile,
Dappled with mango shade,
In canvas deck chair that sags,
the husband
Sits peering out across
A forlorn sea of half-mown lawn,
Balding, out of work, a sad
Columbus.

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Some drone
Of traffic, far off, reassures:
Fifty-Fourth Street still leads
Off toward the Glades at sunset.
And the child,
What is he afraid of?—
The yellow lesson-book
Open on the rack
To that blue, lofty look of hers,
That floats there, cloud-like?
The fan,
Placed on the floor, clicks
With every turn—metronome
Of boredom.
Once more, dear: Larghetto.
Laborers
Coming home, the long day ending.

—*Donald Justice*

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Art

Hayter's line and Golub's message

by Jed Perl

Stanley William Hayter, the eighty-four-year-old English printmaker and painter, has a demonic way with a line. In the two-gallery retrospective of Hayter's career mounted on Fifty-seventh Street in December each journey of the engraver's metal tool, of the draftsman's pen, or of the brush dipped in black paint was as powerful as the snap of a whip—one's eyes felt yanked almost violently through the space. (Hayter's paintings and drawings were on view at the Armstrong Gallery, his prints at Sylvan Cole.) Hayter uses these lines to build up images which range from humanoids with octopus-like limbs to patterns of ocean currents and the equally wavelike curves of non-Euclidean geometry. His work suggests a fluid, unstable, dissolving universe. In perhaps the most beautiful work in the two shows, a 1943 drawing called *Shells from a Wave,* Hayter's lines keep pulling out toward the edges of the sheet in long sweeps of the pen and then bounding back toward the center. Dragging in, flying out, these lines begin to build up a curvaceously labyrinthine mesh of an image which suggests two nuggets of substance—shells—entwined in a watery rhythm of lines of several different thicknesses. The image gives the sense of a process: the force of the draftsman's hand is still alive in the running, jumping swirls of the ink. And there's also something mysterious and slightly spooky about the diaphanousness of it all. A. Hyatt Mayor, the legendary curator of prints at the Metropolitan Museum, characterized Hayter's art perfectly in a note he wrote about the artist in 1948. Hayter expresses "tragic violence through lyric calligraphy." "His line," Mayor said, "is as English as the Lindisfarne Gospels or Aubrey Beardsley."

Hayter, who has lived most of his life in Paris, is world-renowned less as a printmaker and painter than as the founder and guiding spirit of the experimental printmaking shop, Atelier 17. This printshop—which Hayter opened in Paris in 1927, transferred to New York during the war years of the 1940s, and then reopened in Paris in 1950—was a catalyst for generations of artists. In the Paris of the 1920s Hayter became involved in the improvisational and automatist methods of the Surrealists, and in wartime America, where both European refugees like André Masson and Joan Miró and younger Americans like Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko came to Atelier 17, the printshop acted as a center for the dissemination of modernist ideas in the New World. Because of these connections there was a certain historic interest to the Hayter retrospective on West Fifty-seventh Street (Atelier 17 exhibited at the Laurel Gallery on East Fifty-seventh Street in the 1940s); but I don't want to overemphasize this historical side of things. New Yorkers are all too quick to hand over to the historians an artist like Hayter whose interests and tastes aren't exactly *au courant.* What we really should be doing is seeing

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how he fits into the present. This mini-retrospective—especially the show of prints at Sylvan Cole, which included many preliminary states—had an open-ended, exploratory air. Hayter may not all that often come up with perfectly satisfying works of art, but there's always something going on in his work that keeps the circuits of my brain happily abuzz.

The clue to Hayter's solidity as an artist rests in his sense of métier—of craft. This is why, though Hayter has at times said he sees himself more as a painter than a printmaker, the printshop is the context in which we naturally think of him. In the prints (and also in the paintings) Hayter is interested in how an image can be built up from a combination of techniques. He is always pushing the medium from the inside out, using traditional tools in new ways, or developing new techniques to combine with old ones. Within the printmaking world Hayter is famous for encouraging a modernist reconsideration of the possibilities of intaglio printmaking. In intaglio the image is cut into a smooth surface (traditionally a copper plate). Ink is rolled onto the plate; the surface of the plate is wiped clean, so the ink remains only in the indented areas; the inked plate and a wet piece of paper are run through a press; the weight of the press pulls the ink up from the grooves onto the paper and a print emerges. There are many ways to make cuts in the plate—and each has its particular character. The most common method, used by artists since the seventeenth century (the method of Rembrandt and Goya) is the etching of the surface with acid. Etched lines are created by drawing on a plate coated in acid-resistant paint with a stylus, and then letting an acid solution eat out the lines in the plate. These lines have a fuzzy, softly rich quality. Aquatint is a form of all-over etching that involves biting many little holes in the plate; this creates an atmospheric, mottled gray. Engraved lines—which are characteristic of fifteenth-century prints—have the sharpest, cleanest look of all intaglio techniques. They're cut directly into the plate with a tool called a burin.

Hayter is a master of the art of the burin. He can send the metal tool through the copper plate with a fast, smooth move of the arm, so that the line comes out as a single, unbroken curve. He's a great burinist, an engraver in the classic mold; but he also likes to play around with the tradition by combining engraving with aquatint and with color print techniques he originated at Atelier 17. Hayter is a bit of a wizard with technique—combining, juxtaposing—but he's not gimmicky, like the people who do all those dull, impersonal prints at shops such as the Tamarind Lithography Workshop and Gemini G.E.L. on the West Coast. When you think of Hayter exchanging ideas with Miró and Masson and Picasso he seems like a pied piper of printmaking. He takes simple techniques and extends them; he opens up the printmaking tradition in much the way modern painters open up the easel-painting tradition—by turning on their heads all the old assumptions about modeling, space, and color.

New Ways of Gravure, Hayter's 1949 book on printmaking, is a practical and theoretical treatise which does for modern printmaking something of what the treatises of Alberti and Cennini did for Renaissance painting. In Hayter's account the experience of the printshop—where one never knows exactly what will come out of the acid bath or the printing press—connects with the improvisational spirit of Surrealism. In Hayter's writing (which has a beautifully plain-spoken English tone) the printshop is a playground for the imagination. Printmaking obviously takes a great deal of careful preparation and a bit of the clearheadedness of the chemist, but Hayter is unfussy about technique—he loves the idea that if you can figure out how to do it, you can do anything. When I was walking through the large show of Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec's prints that was at the Museum of Modern Art this fall (it was up while the Hayter prints were at Sylvan Cole), I remembered reading a piece Hayter had once written about Lautrec. Looking it up (it turns out to have been in *Art News,* November, 1955), I

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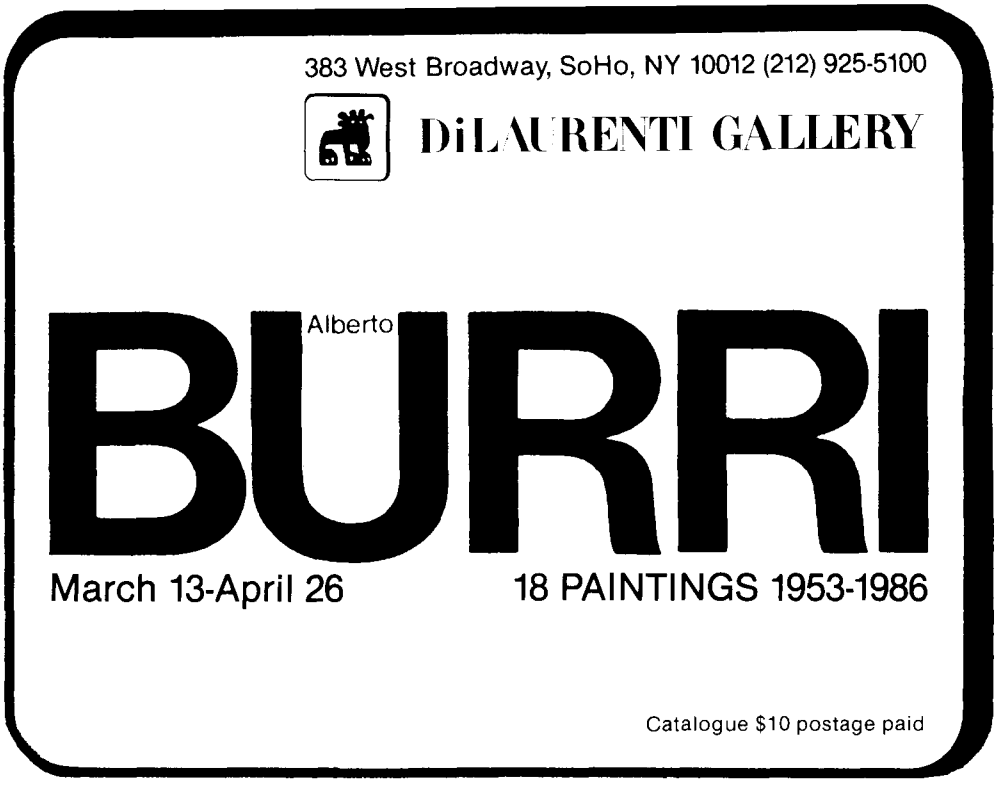

found that the best passage in the essay is not so much about Lautrec as about the spirit of experimentation in the shops where Lautrec's lithographs were printed. In these few lines where Hayter deals with some of the new techniques used in the Lautrecs, you get a vivid sense of a young English artist who came to Paris and looked deeply into the whole turbulent tradition of modern printmaking art.

> I have talked with men who were apprentices in the ateliers where Toulouse-Lautrec, Constantin Guys, Gavarni, Daumier and, later, Rodin made prints, in black and in color. They had methods of laying texture and color which few contemporary lithographers could equal. I recall in the 'twenties one of them who had a shop on the Rue Suger showing me a print with an almost imperceptible background which he told me was obtained with a light wash of soap solution over the whole stone. Devices such as gumming out whites on a stone carrying a wash of color, registration of successive impressions with two needles engaging in pits made in the margin of the stone, were of course perfectly familiar to them, and they had a perception of color almost equal to that of the Japanese artisans who printed the woodblocks cut from the watercolors of Onamura and Hiroshige.

In Hayter's writings the ideas come fast. You feel there's much hard work involved in the life of the printmaker—but you also feel the extraordinary fun of discovery.

The prints at Sylvan Cole, most of which were from the artist's own holdings, didn't give an especially strong picture of this side of Hayter's *oeuvre*. Many of the key works—the ones Hayter has written about and reproduced, such as *Cinq Personnages* (1946)—weren't included. There were none of the color viscosity prints of the 1960s (such as *Poisson Rouge*), in which Hayter was finally able to integrate color printing and intaglio printing. After much experimentation he found he could combine in one run through the press inks of different colors and viscosi-

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ties and make these react to one another and the plate in prearranged ways. What was most interesting at Sylvan Cole was to experience Hayter's fearlessness: he will take a plate through three or more transformations (or states), working his way toward increasingly complicated effects. There's something gutsy and even a bit mad in the way he takes an image and keeps elaborating it. The first states of many of these prints—when they're just pure engraved works, with those marvelous Hayter lines in all their "expressive ambiguity" (Hayter's phrase)—are frequently high points. In the crazy, splayed-all-over-the-place humanoid conundrums of the 1940s and 1950s—*Danae* and *Sun Dancer* were examples at Sylvan Cole—these first black and white states, composed of tight, pulsating curves, make an elegant, succinct effect. But there's also about these early, engraved states a certain lack of definition. Hayter's lines never click into a riveting image the way Miró's or Masson's so often do. Looking at the first state of, for instance, *Danae,* I had the feeling that the addition in succeeding operations of aquatint, of embossed white lines and of color wasn't so much an enhancement of the original image as an attempt to cover up some fundamental insufficiency. The images get more complex; they change, and the changes are fascinating. But it's not clear they get better.

In Hayter's most complex prints—those free-floating, unsettling figures which exist halfway between the whimsy of Calder and the desperation of 1930s Picasso—I feel a clash of opposites. The engraved lines zoom through space, while the various planes of gray and color are like static screens, marking off zones in space. Hayter has a likably unpretty way of handling color—he dotes on clashes of acid green and red, of orange and gray-blue—but the color effects in the prints, where the colors are most always intermingled with the black printer's ink, have a certain grayness. The color is most effective when Hayter consciously strives for a dark effect, as in *Jeux d'Eau,* where bits of greenish yellow and orange break through slate-blue to achieve a moody glimmer reminiscent of Braque's color in the 1930s. There's something choked-up about the mix of elements in these prints. I'm not saying this is necessarily a bad thing; occasionally, the sense of closed horizons can be very moving. Though many of these prints were done after World War II, they all feel like products of the war years.

Hayter's work in painting and printmaking has always run pretty much parallel, but since the Cole show emphasized the 1930s through the early 1950s and the Armstrong show the more recent decades, it was not possible to observe this congruence except in the work of the 1950s. In the oil painting called *Hovering Bird* (1956), the central image—an open-work structure of black lines that bulge outward and then whip back inward—is poised against a backdrop of echoing strokes of blue, orange, red, and green, much as it would be in one of the prints. *Hovering Bird* is a good concise image, and I like the dissonant mix of complementaries. While I haven't seen enough of Hayter's paintings of the 1940s and 1950s to be able to draw any conclusions, it's not clear to me that the prints—which are more frequently acclaimed—are necessarily more successful. Hayter's prints are fabulously intense; his paintings are rather relaxed. In the paintings the color effects seem for once like a natural outcome of the medium. Hayter isn't trying to re-invent an art form, and the viewer can breathe a bit easier.

Since the end of the 1950s, the figural element has drifted out of Hayter's paintings and prints, to be replaced by images of an increasingly abstract and enigmatic quality. In the paintings of around 1960 Hayter reached out to a loose, lyric mode of all-over dripped and thrown paint. (This relates to the development of the color viscosity prints.) These moderate-sized abstractions are alien to American taste, for Americans expect paintings which are mostly concerned with texture to come by the yard, and believe anything with drips is a Pollock imitation. Actually, these paintings are related to the work Masson was doing in the 1950s—but of course no one in America

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takes that seriously, either. I'm always interested in looking at the postwar work of prewar Surrealists like Hayter and Masson, and I'm amazed at how well Hayter manages this vein of lyric color painting; I wouldn't have expected it of him. *Fraises des Bois,* with its running, splattered green-green and bloody berry-reds is a neatly evocative square yard of canvas, and *Tournesols,* with its broad strokes of yellow, splatters of gray, and orange crayon marks has an admirable, curiously cool brightness. Perhaps the most interesting of these pictures at Armstrong was *Winter Solstice* (1961), in which Hayter's printmaking ingenuity seems to pass over into painting. As best I could make out, Hayter was here working the canvas with a batik-like technique. The canvas was roughly brushed with yellow, and then something like paint-resistant wax was drizzled over the surface, so that when Hayter splattered dark, purplish-blues over the yellow, the flung paint was interrupted here and there by areas where the yellow came through. There's an unpretentious inventiveness about Hayter's procedure in *Winter Solstice,* and the light yellow peeking out through the dark, inward-turning purple makes a fitting analogy to winter light.

The work of the 1960s and 1970s returns to a more regular use of line—to intertwined webs and weavings of lines. There's something of modern science and also something of the meditative repetitiveness of Islamic carpet patterns in these increasingly light, translucent paintings. I like the size of the canvases—three to four feet—it doesn't make us feel overwhelmed. *Standing Waves,* with its rising, overlapping rhythms of blue and green, and *Turbulence,* with its interwoven, watery patterns of purple, blue, and a bit of yellow, are serenely mystical. They have the blissful, slightly empty quality of summer days at the beach, when you've floated on your back on a calm ocean, looking up to the endless sky.

In the passage of Hayter's work from the pulled-apart, tumbling figures of the 1930s and 1940s to the yin-yangy abstractions of the 1960s and 1970s, one sees a transition from the tormented to the serene which is fairly common in European art between 1930 and 1960. At least in Hayter's case this change in subject doesn't seem to suggest some change in outlook between the earlier and the later work. Hayter's most famous work of the 1940s may suggest a tragic vision, but one never feels this aspect of his art to be something experienced firsthand—just as, in the later work, one doesn't sense the peacefulness to be a deep aspect of his personality. In part this impersonality may be a limitation of the work. I never see Hayter's figures of the 1940s as individuals. (I can relate one-on-one to some of the equally nonnaturalistic figures of Klee and Miró.) I never feel intimately connected with the mood of Hayter's work. Still, one of the strengths of his art is just that he doesn't force the tragedy of his figures or the serenity of his abstractions upon us. There's a circumspection about the expression of emotions in his paintings and prints that I find admirable; he pulls us into a mood not by pandering to sentiments, but through the way we experience the painting or print as a totality. Hayter lets the art live a life of its own. His work has a modesty about it. This may reflect an honest appraisal of his limits as an imaginative artist, but something about Hayter's willingness to bow to the imperatives of form also connects his art with the largest achievements. Hayter has no desire to fool himself—or us.

Many artists in the 1930s and 1940s weren't so circumspect as Hayter about expressing their sense of the political and social upheavals of the time. Most of this engagé work—the Mexican murals, the Sacco and Vanzetti oils of Ben Shahn—is of little more than period interest. Picasso, in *Guernica,* is the one artist of the 1930s who took up current events and made something we still really want to look at. *Guernica* is the great *piece d'occasion* of the century, but as a work of art it's caught inconclusively between the conventions of history painting and Cubism. The *Charnel House* (1944-45), with a black-and-white scheme borrowed

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from *Guernica,* is less compelling but artistically more complete, and there are many smaller Picassos of the 1930s that through their private subjects exceed *Guernica* in the pictorial expression of tragedy. It's difficult —perhaps impossible—to paint a great political work of art in this century; and yet artists continue to try.

Leon Golub, who had his first vogue in the 1950s with Expressionist rehashes of themes from classical sculpture, has now emerged, after a decade and a half out of the limelight, as the political artist of the 1980s. Donald Kuspit's book *Leon Golub: Existential/Activist* is in the stores,[1] a retrospective organized by the New Museum of Contemporary Art has just wound up a year-long tour at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts,[2] and the Barbara Gladstone Gallery in New York was showing (in January) some newer works. Golub's current fame rests mostly on two series of enormous figure paintings done in the late 1970s and early 1980s—the "Mercenaries" and the "Interrogations"—which depict the scrappy, ugly day-by-day facts of the little and not-so-little wars that have ravaged Southeast Asia and Central America for the past quarter century. Golub paints these visions on enormous unstretched pieces of canvas, and walking through the galleries at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts where the show was mounted you felt that Golub was depicting a world where every last scrap of dignity had been blotted out. I can't imagine there's anyone who would deny that Golub's sadistic torturers and helpless victims exist in many parts of the world—and who can be unmoved? Yet to be moved by what we know about the world is one thing; and to be moved by a painting is another. I feel Golub's paintings are fundamentally inexpressive. They evoke the front-page headlines—but is that really what we want from art?

Golub's "Mercenaries" and "Interrogations" come by the yard—the biggest picture in Boston was almost twenty feet long—but they're not spacious. Against a monochromatic field (often of a bloody Pompeian red) Golub arranges his figures like collage elements: he will put a leering soldier in green fatigues and sunglasses here; a naked, blindfolded victim there. These figures have the dry, descriptive look of drawings in a newsmagazine. The wrinkles on the clothing, the lines and expressions on the faces aren't given any pictorial weight. There's a sameness to the treatment of each part of the figures. You don't get the feeling of passion in the figure painting. Golub's brush just dithers along, covering ground. He doesn't build up an atmosphere. In the "Interrogations" and "Mercenaries" he doesn't show us what the torture cell or the battlefield actually looks like; and in some of the more recent paintings, those exhibited at Barbara Gladstone, he places his figures in a vague, any-jail kind of space. He seems to think he can get to the universals by wiping out all the specifics, but it doesn't work.

Golub's figures and situations are never freshly observed. The series of small portraits of Nelson Rockefeller—all look to be done from photographs—have none of the excitement we expect from major political portraiture. We don't have the sense that Golub has sat down in front of this enormously powerful man and entered into a relationship with him. Golub isn't in contact with his subject. When I look at the Nelson Rockefeller portraits I'm thinking about Rockefeller, not about what Leon Golub thinks about Rockefeller. Events in Rocky's life flash through my mind—especially that strange, embarrassing death—but Golub

1 *Leon Golub: Existential/Activist* by Donald Kuspit; Rutgers University Press, 213 pages, $40.

2 "Golub" was on view at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts from November 5, 1985, through February 2, 1986. The exhibition began at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York in September of 1984. From there it travelled to the La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, and the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. "Golub" was organized by Lynn Gumpert and Ned Rifkin of the New Museum.

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doesn't bring them together. Rockefeller's role in American life is so immense—we think of Attica, the art collections, the divorce, all the runs for the presidency, the great wealth—and the man simply effaces Golub's wimpy oil studies. These little portraits are Golub's bumper stickers; the big paintings are Golub's billboards.

In interviews and statements Leon Golub has often claimed that his primary subject is power. In the 1960s, in the series of big tan and brown paintings of hulking male nudes called "Gigantomachies" he was dealing with pure brute power. These massive male figures are piled on top of one another so that the canvas often becomes one thickening mass. The titles signal a connection to the series of battle reliefs, dating from the second century B.C., on the Altar of Zeus in Pergamon in Asia Minor. Golub definitely wants his male figures to have the powerful aura of late classical art, in which the delicate beauty of fifth-century sculpture has aged, becoming thick and a bit stolid. Golub seems to think the force of late Greek and Imperial Roman art is a matter of outward characteristics: in Golub's art a close-cropped head, a massive torso is supposed to connote power. This is a bad miscalculation. The grandeur of Hellenistic art rests in the artists' ability to express power through the muscular strength of the body. In the Pergamon reliefs the qualities of tension and stress are lodged right in the anatomy of the nudes—and of course Golub, who probably knows no anatomy and in any event has no sense of bodily movement beyond the manipulations of stick figures, can't make us feel tension or pressure or energy as a muscular experience. In the "Gigantomachies" Golub's idea of power is to flash some thick strokes of paint across the canvas. It's the old macho artist routine.

In his more recent work, such as the "Interrogations" and the "Mercenaries," Golub attempts to give us a different view of power. He is dealing here not so much with naked force as with the power relationships in violent contemporary societies. These recent images of killers and torturers in military khaki

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and victims (some stark naked and horribly trussed up) place power into the terms of a modern world we're all familiar with at least from newspapers and television. Here power is represented by institutions and machines —police and guns. To succeed with these paintings one would not necessarily need to be a top-notch figure draftsman; we don't have to feel the sense of power emanating from the musculature itself. What we need in painting like this is a highly developed dramatic sense—Giotto would be the supreme example. The artist needs a novelistic gift for characterization, and he also has to know how to build compositions in which the structure itself—with its various intervals, its more and less open areas—expresses the psychic states and relationships of the figures. Golub, with his grimacing faces and big empty spaces, is gesturing in the direction of this sort of drama, and I expect many people think he succeeds. But his dramas have no internal pictorial coherence. The figures don't relate; stuck into vague, generic backgrounds, they barely exist in a social context.

Leon Golub's basic premise—beastly things go on in the world—is easy to swallow, and many people think his work and his message fill a yawning void in the art scene. The artist himself has become a sort of emblematic figure. With his bald cranium, lined face, and darkly circled eyes, this sixty-four-year-old painter, who had no one-man shows in New York for twenty years, is now represented as a survivor who's devoted a hard-won fame to the cause of suffering worldwide. The articles published about him in the past five years all have a join-or-be-damned air. The reviewer who puts in a dissenting view is in danger of being called heartless—heartless to an artist who's struggled and survived, and heartless to the victims of oppression around the world. But I can't help feeling Golub would be less generally loved if his work weren't so histrionic and self-righteous. It's the easiest thing in the world to call this work political, but it has the fuzzy style of ineffectual political rhetoric. Golub makes images, but their power doesn't take hold.

My view of Golub's work has nothing to do with his politics. I don't feel antagonistic toward his views, for the simple reason that my own politics, which might most easily be described as left liberal, embrace an attitude toward American involvement in the Third World which is, like Golub's, highly critical. Even if he's further left than I am, which he probably is, I can understand how someone comes to stand there, and don't find it strange or objectionable. I mention my own views only in order to combat the assumption—all too common nowadays—that there's some one-to-one relation between the kind of art people like and the kind of politics they practice. This line of thinking doesn't help anything, least of all the cause of an authentic political art. There's an element of blackmail that surrounds Leon Golub; you're made to look like a monster if you don't buy his paintings and his view of the world. But what those views exactly are it isn't possible to understand from the paintings (or, for that matter, from Golub's rather grandiose statements). Does Golub see his mercenaries and interrogators as the brutalized pawns of some larger evil power? Or are they wicked in and of themselves? Does he see America as the root of all troubles in the world—a hopeless, monstrous force? Or is Golub's America more of a tragic giant, dreadfully misled, but still capable of salvation? A picture of an atrocity—which is Golub's essential subject—is in a sense politically neutral: only when we know who did it, and how often, and where, and to whom does it take on a *political* meaning. If a political art is going to be of real interest, it must be able to get at the issues that engage us in politics: at the moral, ideological, and practical questions out of which a genuine politics is constructed. Golub has said, "I translate power into violence because it is power's ultimate effect." One could easily turn this around and argue, as Hannah Arendt does in her book *On Violence,* that violence is the resort of those who don't have real power.

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Leon Golub's art defines the humanistic side of the political art of the 1980s. (I wonder when the Leonard Baskin revival will begin.) Golub appeals to our sense of suffering and injustice, and there's nothing surprising about hearing this appeal from an American artist now. American artists know they live in a powerful country, and they understand that this nation can affect what happens in the world, for better or for worse. They see all the miseries and injustices in the world—and they want to speak out. They also, I believe, are frustrated by the limited range of experience which art has been able to give voice to in the modern world. In the past 150 years the visual arts have expressed the subtlety of private emotions more completely than ever before in history. Now artists feel trapped by this private view—they want to speak to the concerns of public man.

Leftist critics point out that the modernist art of pure expression is a product and in a sense a hostage of bourgeois culture. The political artist wants to express his freedom from bourgeois culture by formulating a new genre—political art. But the freedom of the artist has never rested in a particular genre or a particular relation to society. All artists—the fifth-century B.C. sculptor, the Medieval stained-glass artist, the modern easel painter—are limited by the genres and conventions that culture offers them. Freedom in art rests in the freedom the artist finds within conventions—and through conventions. And this freedom is, I believe, absolute—a liberty of the imagination whose only check is the imagination itself. I have no problem with Leon Golub's desire to forge a new genre, to take art beyond the traditional modernist subjects of the art gallery. He may have broken with the conventional idea of what an artist does, but he remains a bad, conventional artist because he's incapable of expressing himself freely within the world of forms.

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Theater

Aunt Dan and Wally

by Mimi Kramer

"There's something that people never say about the Nazis now," says Lemon toward the close of Wallace Shawn's play. She is sitting quietly in a chair, hands folded in her lap, surrounded by shelves and shelves of medicine bottles and fruit juices, chatting demurely to the audience. If we have any inkling that the play is about to end, it's because this is where we came in.

> The thing is that the Nazis were trying to create a certain way of life for themselves.

In gentle, mellifluous tones and the sing-song voice that one uses for explaining very, very difficult things to children, Lemon proceeds to tell us why it is "absurd to talk about the Nazis as if the Nazis were unique." For, as Lemon explains, "the mere fact of killing human beings in order to create a certain way of life is not something that exactly distinguishes the Nazis from everybody else." To illustrate her point, Lemon refers us to society's treatment of criminals (whom, she suggests, we would simply exterminate if ever they got to be so much of a problem "that our most basic hopes as a society were truly threatened by them") and also to the fate of the American Indians (whom, Lemon points out, the European settlers slaughtered in order "to build the kind of society the Europeans wanted"). "So," she concludes, "it becomes absurd to talk about the Nazis as if the Nazis were unique."

> That's a kind of hypocrisy. Because the fact is, no society has ever considered the taking of life an unpardonable crime or even, really, a major tragedy. It's something that's done when it has to be done, and it's as simple as that.

It is, I take it, this speech that has reportedly caused such a furor among audiences at the Public Theater, where *Aunt Dan and Lemon* is currently playing. One article that appeared in *The New York Times* shortly after the play had opened pronounced *Aunt Dan and Lemon* "nothing if not controversial," describing how "a score of people" had "stalked out of the theater" one night "to protest Kathryn Pogson's final monologue." And the Sunday before the opening, Michael Billington's interview with Wallace Shawn in the Arts and Leisure Section talked about how "controversial" *Aunt Dan and Lemon* had already proved "in London because of its political content," predicting that the play was "likely to provoke considerable discussion in New York as well."

But no one "stalked" out of Martinson Hall on the night I went to see *Aunt Dan and Lemon* and no one I know seems to have found it particularly "controversial." Controversy, as a rule, occurs when people disagree about something. But the response to *Aunt Dan and Lemon* among people I know has been pretty unanimous: basically, nobody liked it. My friend Roger was quietly contemptuous of the play, my friend Charlotte

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passionate. "It was a horrible play! Horrible!" she exclaimed, contorting her hands and face expressively. Mark was more circumspect: "I think it should be produced, but I certainly don't want to sit through it," he said. In fact, most people I know seem to have found Shawn's play offensive in one way or another, with differences of opinion largely confined to the nature and degree of offense. Roger called it "a gratuitous slap in the face of a perfectly harmless theatrical convention, namely plot." To Charlotte the problem with *Aunt Dan and Lemon* was more basic: "Who wants to hear about Henry Kissinger?" she said.

I don't, especially. But I did want to hear about "Lemon" and her memories. Of course, *Aunt Dan and Lemon* has got a plot, albeit a slender one: in essence a version of the Jean Brodie story, Shawn's play is about the effects of a dangerous and charismatic woman on an impressionable young girl. It posits a peculiar individual, offering to tell us the story of how she got to be the way she is, and in the darkness of Martinson Hall I remember wanting to hear that story. I remember wanting to find out why Lemon sat there among her pill bottles and fruit juices saying startlingly unpleasant things in gentle, well-modulated tones, why she couldn't eat, didn't sleep, and didn't seem to care very much whether she lived or died. Most of all —because it seemed important—I wanted to find out why she spent most of her time reading about the Nazis.

The 1968 stage version of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* has a pretty hokey beginning. The script that Jay Presson Allen, a Hollywood screenwriter, based on Muriel Spark's novel presents us with "Sister Helena," one of the girls in the "Brodie set" now grown up and a nun. A journalist comes to interview her, seeing as she has recently published a best-selling book on psychology. The journalist asks the nun what person or thing has had the most influence on her life and thought; and so "Sister Helena" begins to tell us about "a Miss Jean Brodie in her prime." Wallace Shawn's Lemon also wants to tell us about the person who had the greatest hand in shaping her thinking and ideas. There's no journalist, no treatise on psychology. But the principle is exactly the same.

"Dear people," says Lemon, "come inside into my little flat, and I'll tell you everything about my life." And, by God, she does. She tells us a little about her American father and English mother, for instance, and the place where they lived. Sometimes Mr. Shawn's play resembles a late-night talk show: Lemon will say a few words about a character and he or she will come out and perform a little "schtick." Thus, rather like a stand-up comic, Lemon's father (played by Mr. Shawn himself) delivers a lengthy speech to the audience and engages in a brief dialogue with another character before, as it were, retiring to a less important chair. At other times the writing resembles the script for a second-grade pageant. "Some people have warm memories of their family table," says Lemon:

> I can't say I do! There was a problem about that family table for me.

And, hey presto! we get a little scene establishing Lemon's early anorexia.

The greatest influence on Lemon turns out to have been her parents' former friend, the redoubtable Aunt Dan, ("one of the youngest Americans to ever teach at Oxford," says Lemon) and most of the memories Lemon wants to share with us date from the summer that she was eleven ("the last time my parents and Aunt Dan were friends," as she explains). Accordingly, most of Shawn's play consists of rather lengthy and unrelated set pieces in which Aunt Dan is holding forth while somebody else is listening. Sometimes she talks to Lemon, sometimes to Lemon's mother. She tells Lemon stories of her wild student days and the charming, promiscuous people she knew.

> You see, the thing was, Geoffrey was the most fantastic liar—I mean he was so astonishingly handsome, with those gorgeous eyes and those

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> thick, black eyebrows—he just had to look at a woman, with those eyes of his, and she immediately believed every word that he said. And he didn't mind lying to his wife at all, because she'd trapped him into the marriage in the first place, in the most disgusting way . . . .

She lectures Lemon on the importance of courtesy to menials and tells her about the wonderful affair she had with a married professor, "the most famous professor in the whole university, a great philosopher."

> Well, for the first two days we didn't *move* from bed—I mean, we occasionally reached across to the table and grabbed a pear or an apple or something—and then on the third day we called a taxi, and we went all the way into London to this extraordinary shop—I'd never seen anything like it in my life—and while the taxi waited we simply filled basket after basket with all this incredible food . . . and then we just piled it all into the taxi, along with bottles and bottles of wine and champagne, and back we went to my tiny basement and spent the rest of the week just living like pigs.

Aunt Dan talks to Lemon about music—"I mean, Lemon, you know, that *Transfigured Night* could just make you squeal, it's just as if Arnold Schoenberg was inside your dress and running his hands over you entire body . . ."—and about her friends. Mostly, though, she talks about Henry Kissinger: about how nobody understands the burdens of leadership—talk, talk, talk—about how heavy the head lies that bears the responsibility for killing innocent people—talk, talk, talk. She lectures Lemon on the finer strategic points of American diplomatic relations with the Chinese and she lectures Lemon's mother about the loneliness of having to make necessary decisions that nobody is going to thank you for. When Aunt Dan runs out of things to say about Kissinger, the audience is treated to a story about Mindy, one of the friends Aunt Dan remembers most fondly, a girl (to all appearances) with a very brief attention span, who murders a man while in

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the midst of performing fellatio upon him. This event, which led, we learn, to a brief fling between Mindy and Aunt Dan, is enacted in a seemingly endless flashback sequence.

Finally, Aunt Dan dies—or, rather, Lemon tells us of the last time she went to visit Dan in London before her death. At the end of this sequence, Lemon turns back to the audience, resumes her seat in the chair in which she began the evening, and delivers her disquisition on the Nazis and "compassion." What Lemon likes about the Nazis, she announces at this point, is that

> they sort of had the nerve to say, "Well, what *is* this compassion? Because I don't really know what it is. So I want to know, really, what is it?" And they must have sort of asked each other at some point, "Well say, Heinz, have *you* ever felt it?" "Well no, Rolf, what about you?" And they all had to admit that they really didn't know what the hell it was. I find it sort of relaxing to read about those people, because I have to admit that I don't know either.

Lemon makes one final plea on behalf of "people who are willing to take the job of killing on their own backs," suggesting that "it's not a bad thing every once in a while" to give them "a tiny, fractional crumb of thanks." Then she is gone.

Few of the other critics have had much good to say of Wallace Shawn's play. "*Aunt Dan* pretends to be iconoclastic," ran the pull-quote from John Simon's review in *New York* magazine, "but merely offends against taste and intelligence." In a Sunday *Times* piece about "social drama," Walter Goodman wrote: "The question at the end of the evening is, does this play mean *anything*?" In *The New Republic,* Robert Brustein seems to have found *Aunt Dan and Lemon* less an intellectual challenge than a play "about Wallace Shawn's relationship with his audience." And in *The Nation,* Paul Berman called it "a repulsive, self-indulgent spiel on Nazi themes and not at all a legitimate play of ideas." This time, I have to say, I side with the boys.

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But I don't think what made *Aunt Dan and Lemon* irritating or "offensive" had anything to do with "political content": it had none. I think what made people cross was their sense that the play was a cheat. And it is: Shawn withholds from the audience the one piece of information about Lemon that it is vital for us to know—that she is actually a Nazi-lover. The opening monologue establishes merely that she is fascinated by the phenomenon of Nazism, that (among other singular characteristics Lemon possesses) she spends all her time reading about Nazis. It does not tell us that she admires them. To be sure, the trick of withholding this bit of information allows Wallace Shawn the satisfaction of making us all feel a little like Nazis because we have, perforce, like Lemon, grown fond of Aunt Dan and her eccentricities, her emphatic way of talking, and her funny ideas. By default she is the most compelling character in the play (if only because Kissinger is the only other character developed at all). Besides, we think it's cute the way Aunt Dan uses stuffed animals in order to explain military strategy to Lemon.

But the suppression of Lemon's Nazi leanings is also, I think, what enables Shawn to hold our interest to the extent he does, because it hides the fundamental banality of his point. Essentially his play asks the question: "How does a sweet young thing like Lemon wind up sitting on a stage and chatting with reasonableness and respect about the Nazis?" His answer: "Put her in close contact with an admirer of Henry Kissinger's foreign policy." But because we've been kept in the dark about Lemon's sympathy with Nazism, we keep on listening for an answer without knowing what the question really is. Which we would not, I think, be willing to do had we all the facts at our disposal. If Shawn had let us in on his little secret at any point before the closing seconds of his play, I imagine that people would be walking out long before the final monologue.

It is always fascinating to watch the effects of an ominously forceful and captivating personality on an impressionable mind. What makes it fascinating, though, are complications and complexities: the fact that people have conflicting loyalties, ambivalences, little reasons and motivations for doing what they do. Throughout the evening Wallace Shawn suckers us into a state of acquiescence and attention by filling the stage with details that seem to promise answers to quite a different set of questions than the one he's really headed for. So we go on wanting to hear the end of Lemon's story—wanting to find out why it is important that her mother was English and her father an "ugly American," why we've been told that her parents squabbled over her early eating habits, why she hated her father and remembers her mother talking soulfully about Oxford mornings. It is only moments before we leave the theater that we realize such details as the nationality of Lemon's parents are there only for the most trivial reasons: to absolve Wally Shawn from having to worry too much about Lemon's speech patterns, say, or to enable him to perform in the play. So we continue to sit in the darkness of Martinson Hall, waiting to hear about what finally happened after that last summer, when the rift between Aunt Dan and Lemon's parents caused by politics finally occurred and Lemon had to choose.

But Wallace Shawn isn't interested in character, he's interested in ideas. His "intention," according to the *Times* interview with Michael Billington, is "basically to challenge a liberal audience to rethink its position and to confront them with certain unpalatable truths." Consequently, the article explained, Shawn has presented an articulate "conservative" viewpoint without allowing any response to be made to it. Explains Shawn, "What you might call the liberal voice is not the dominant one in America right now."

> People like myself have been reduced to a gaping, open-mouthed silence in this particular period; and the response to Reagan by those who oppose him hasn't been as inspired as one might hope . . . . I'm trying to provoke a response in the many hundreds who I hope will see the play. I think it's more interesting

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> not to put my own attitudes into the play, which would allow the audience to go home satisfied . . . .

With all due respect to Mr. Shawn, I think this belongs in what is sometimes called in his father's magazine the "Words of One Syllable Department."

Scarcely anyone failed to notice that Shawn neatly undercuts his "conservative" mouthpiece by having her turn out to be—as my friend Roger put it—"a psychotic lesbian killer." Actually, the "conservative" arguments Shawn puts in Aunt Dan's mouth are not even creditable. Every one of them (like all of Lemon's distortions of "liberal" arguments) is argued on the basis of self-interest. Whether Aunt Dan is explaining to Lemon why it is she never speaks harshly to a waiter (because waiters are useful; we need them) or explaining why Henry Kissinger should bomb Vietnamese villages (because he is preserving for us the way of life we find most pleasant), her arguments are singular only for being devoid of any whisper of the notion of moral responsibility. Wallace Shawn's Aunt Dan is not a conservative moralist at all; she is a self-serving monster. It isn't any wonder that Lemon ends up preaching Nazism. If you start with the notion that the ends justify the means, you will almost certainly end up there.

Actually, I think that *Aunt Dan and Lemon* is about as controversial as Campbell's soup. And the only mildly disturbing thing about the ideas it deals with is the apparent fragility of Mr. Shawn's grasp on them. But I found the essay he chose to publish as an appendix to his play exceedingly disturbing. Disturbing and disillusioning. After all, Wally Shawn, for some years now, has enjoyed a reputation as a funny little man with the ability to capture the everyday speech of the educated man in the street, in both his writing and his performance. He is master of the emphatic, the periphrastic, the repetitious, and the long-winded phrase expressing, in the deceptive accents of banality, the thought that lies just far enough beyond the reaches of the mundane to conjure up something like irony. Sitting in the audience during *Aunt Dan and Lemon,* we laugh when Shawn delivers the speech of Lemon's father because we think he has managed to capture so exactly the way a certain kind of person talks.

In fact, that's just the way Shawn talks, the way he thinks and writes; and a glance at his essay (or at an interview with him) reveals this. All those gratuitous phrases, those circumlocutions—the what-you-might-call-the-liberal-voices, the people-like-myselfs, the in-this-particular-periods, and the happen-to-bes—are just Shawn himself, not social commentary at all. But Shawn's essay is disturbing for another reason as well. It suggests that Aunt Dan's moral reasoning is primitive not by design, not because Wallace Shawn is being crafty or disingenuous, but because he himself has never got beyond a certain point in his own thinking. A meditation after the fashion of one of Bernard Shaw's "Prefaces" (except that it follows the text of the play), Shawn's essay, entitled "On the Context of the Play," attempts to amplify or elaborate on some of the ideas he explores in *Aunt Dan and Lemon.*

> My parents [writes Shawn] brought me up to believe that there was something terribly important called morality—an approach towards life which was based on the paradoxical concept of self-restraint (or the restraint of one part of the self by another part). Instead of teaching me merely to be alert to the threat of potential enemies outside myself, I was instructed to practice, in addition, a sort of constant vigilance over my own impulses—even, at times, a subjugation of them, when certain abstract criteria of justice (which lived in my own mind) determined that someone else's interests should be allowed to prevail over my own desires. Morality, this fantastic and complicated system (which a good many of my friends were taught by their parents as well), was, as we first encountered it, a set of principles and laws. But these principles and laws were really nothing more than a description of how a person would behave if he cared equally about all human beings, even though one of them happened, in

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> fact, to be himself—if he cared about them equally and deeply, so that their suffering actually caused him to suffer as well . . . . If I could learn to believe that someone, a stranger, was just as real as I was, I could easily see how badly it would hurt him if I treated him cruelly, if I lied to him, if I betrayed him.
>
> But the world is in a constant turmoil of conflict and struggle, I learned, and so morality was not merely a way of looking at life; it was also a guide to action . . . .

On and on it goes. And on and on.

> My daily obligation, then, was certainly not to refrain from action. On the contrary, passivity was seen, from this point of view, as merely a lazy, indifferent, and cowardly form of actionless action. Nor was my obligation to refrain from all activity on my own behalf. No, my daily obligation was, first and foremost, to learn how to make a correct and careful study of the world.
>
> Perhaps I had long ago rejected self-love and self-interest as guides to action. Perhaps I had sworn to myself that I would always act only for everyone's sake, out of love for everyone. But if I didn't know what the world was like, how could I know what action to take? Perhaps it was permissible to kill a person in order to prevent a terrible evil. But if I acted impulsively, heedlessly, and blindly—if I killed the wrong person because I relied on an erroneous suspicion or an intuition, or I based my action on some erroneous theory of the world which I'd accepted for years because it happened to be flattering to someone like me—would I still have behaved in a permissible way? Obviously not. How, then, could I act at all unless . . .

and on and on and on.

The startling thing about this essay is its utter artlessness. It reads like the work of one uniformly innocent of the whole history of ideas, who has never read a book, had a thought, or encountered an idea in his life: never heard of Plato, let alone Locke or Hobbes or John Stuart Mill. As Shawn goes on to tackle such concepts as good and evil or the uses and purposes of government one can only shake one's head in disbelief and cry out: "Is this guy for real?" Does he really think that no one has ever grappled with any of this before? Or is he just so entranced, so hypnotized by the spectacle of himself thinking, thinking, thinking these hard thoughts that he can't turn himself off? I fear the latter. Wittering on in this way for twenty pages or so without saying much of anything at all, Shawn gives the impression of someone who is fascinated not so much by ideas as by the idea of ideas. His essay seems to reach the unutterable conclusion that "what you might call" ideas are awfully complicated things, so that anyone willing to sit down and have a good think about them deserves . . . what? To have a play produced, perhaps?

The most charitable interpretation I have heard on the phenomenon of Wallace Shawn is also the most interesting. A friend tells me that a friend of his found *Aunt Dan and Lemon* to be less about any of the moral or political issues it thinks it raises than about the experience of being Wally Shawn, meaning that of growing up in the shadow of intellectuals. This seems to me extraordinarily astute, an observation that comes as close as anything I've encountered to drawing something out of Shawn's play that is worth keeping. Throughout *Aunt Dan and Lemon*, after all, what we are watching is the spectacle of a child being dazzled by the rather glamorous and brilliant-seeming people and events she cannot understand. Seen in this light, what *Aunt Dan and Lemon* has to offer may be no more than the depiction of a particular perspective, one that we ought, perhaps, to know about. That Wally Shawn once saw the world from this perspective is clear. It may be that he still does.

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Music

A great Spanish pianist

by Samuel Lipman

There can be little doubt that sound recording has been a mixed blessing for serious music. The easy availability of masterpieces, the permanent engraving of transient interpretative conceptions on discs and tapes, the marketing of works of art in their mechanical and electronic copies rather than in the live form in which they were born: all these factors have affected the state of musical art in our time, and taken together, they have gone far to balance out the benefits always envisioned from the diffusion of a high and refined culture.

Yet much as music lovers must blame recordings for the present stultification of contemporary composition, it cannot be denied that these recordings have preserved much in past musical performance of value and beauty. We all know this is true for the famous figures of the past eight or so decades—the Carusos, the Rachmaninoffs, the Toscaninis, the Schnabels, and the Szigetis; we know their work today almost better than did those lucky listeners who could hear them in person. But there is another class of wonderful performers the phonograph also has preserved: the artists of small and gentle personalities, the figures whose natural audience was not worldwide but was nonetheless sophisticated, discriminating, and passionate.

Such an extraordinary artist, made immortal by the phonograph and whom we now can hear on a well-done LP transfer,[1] was the Spanish—or more properly Catalan—pianist Ricardo Viñes. Born in Lérida in 1875, he died in Barcelona in 1943. According to *The New Grove Dictionary,* he toured widely in Europe and South America, though he never played in the United States. His specialty was the then contemporary French and Spanish music being written by Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel in his adopted country, and by Isaac Albéniz and Enrique Granados in the land of his birth and death. He studied with Granados as well as with the great French theory teacher Albert Lavignac (1846-1916); Viñes's best-known pupil was the composer Francis Poulenc, the minor master whose large body of music seems to become more gratifying to play and to hear as time passes.

Not only was Viñes a friend of Debussy and Ravel, but his playing, greatly admired by them, occupied a formative role in their composition. We learn of Viñes's relation to both these composers from Edward Lockspeiser's standard English-language biography of Debussy:

> The personal and artistic relationship between Debussy and Ravel was complex, but there is one aspect of this relationship which is immediately striking: it was largely centred on their common friend, the Spanish pianist Ricardo Viñes. No pianist of the twentieth century, nor indeed of the nineteenth, enjoyed the privileges

1 "Ricardo Viñes Récital," EMI (France) *Références* 1731791.

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of Viñes. Chopin and Liszt and the other great nineteenth-century pianists were themselves composers for the piano who interpreted their own and other composers' works. Apart from his *Hommages* to Satie and Séverac, Viñes was nothing of a composer and he did not claim to be a pianist of this towering order. Yet within the short period of twelve years, from his first performance in 1901 of Ravel's *Menuet antique,* to his first performance of three Preludes of Debussy in 1913, he had introduced almost the entire piano repertory of Debussy and Ravel.

. . . somewhere near the heart of the music not only of Ravel but also of Debussy there remained a nostalgia for the Spanish scene which the very presence of Viñes must have encouraged. The life and soul of the 'Club des Apaches', the gatherings of artists at which Ravel and M. D. Calvocoressi [an important French music critic] were prominent figures, Viñes, with his long oval head and penetrating look, was said by the poet Léon-Paul Fargue to have created the impression of an 'El Greco who might have been gay'. He was drawn to literture and painting as much as to music; and it was he who introduced Ravel to the lugubrious prose poems of Aloysius Bertrand, *Gaspard de la Nuit,* which inspired his amazing virtuoso piano suite.

One more fact must be adduced in documentation of the pianist's remarkable relation to the art of his time, a relation which stands in glaring contrast to the present isolation of serious music from the life of the mind. In the second volume of George Painter's biography of Marcel Proust, we find that in the world of that great novelist the musician Viñes too had a place:

[Proust] had kept in touch with Porel [Jacques Porel, the son of the great actress Réjane], and called at Rue Laurent-Pichat one evening, tottering and smiling in white tie and tails, when Ricardo Viñes was playing Debussy. Proust sat on the sofa with Léon-Paul Fargue, while the pianist, his head buried in the keyboard, seemed to confide a secret to the composer; and glancing at the couple on the sofa Porel saw that Fargue, who became somnolent when supremely happy and was never happier than when Debussy was played, had fallen asleep on Proust's shoulder.

Though we must be grateful for the small number of performances Viñes has left us, it is sad that he did not record Ravel's *Gaspard de la Nuit,* perhaps the high-water mark of technically luxuriant writing for the keyboard; indeed, he recorded (on the evidence of *The World's Encyclopaedia of Recorded Music*) nothing at all of Ravel, and precious little of Debussy. But what he did record, and what is contained on the present LP transfer of 78RPM discs made in Paris in 1930 and 1936, is precious indeed. This repertory includes a Scarlatti sonata, a Brahms transcription of the Gavotte from Gluck's *Iphigénie en Aulide,* six pieces by Albéniz, a Scherzo of Borodin, two important works of Debussy, two extracts from *El amor brujo* of Manuel de Falla (including the "Ritual Dance of Fire" made famous by Arthur Rubinstein), two works by the Spanish composer Joaquín Turina, and assorted salon pieces by the now forgotten minor composers Manuel Blancafort (Spanish, born 1897), Carlos López Buchardo (Argentine, 1881-1948), and Cayetano Troiani (Italian-Argentine, 1873-1942). The last-named is, oh fate of fates, not to be found even in the capacious womb of *The New Grove.*

The impression given by Viñes's performances of all these pieces is that of a mellifluous and genteel pianist possessing a fleet and refined technique. Viñes's technique makes its point by its charm rather than by its exactitude; nothing in his playing is as disciplined and precise as we have come to expect from contemporary instrumentalists whose training has replaced genius by method.

Perhaps it is just what we today see as this lack of rigor that causes the Scarlatti Sonata in D major (Longo 461), which serves as the first selection on the Viñes LP, to seem altogether his least satisfactory playing. There are many false notes in this performance, artfully hidden in the pianist's easy sweep; indeed, it is this very *panache* which makes

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the listener feel that Viñes isn't taking the notes of this hallowed old music as seriously as he might, and as we certainly would today. No such strictures apply to his playing of the Brahms-transcribed excerpt from Gluck's *Iphigénie en Aulide*. Here the playing is suffused by a genteel, almost lazy archaism. The pianist's well-executed double notes are jaunty but always light, and the result is on the mechanical level a triumph of the most elegant French-influenced pianism.

The Albéniz pieces which follow the Scarlatti and the Gluck-Brahms are, in Viñes's hands, extraordinary. One would not want to make any claim that this is music of the greatest profundity; it is rather an amalgam of earthy folk origins and sophisticated harmonic and pianistic treatment. At its best—and in the best performances—this music evokes an irresistible gaiety often tinged by a bittersweet sadness. This is an emotional world Viñes captures completely, avoiding the brittleness and tonal harshness with which such music is usually played. It is music of the utmost pianistic difficulty, and it is plain from "Granada," the first of the Albéniz pieces on this record, as it is from those that follow, that Viñes puts this difficulty in its proper place: he keeps it to himself. The result is pure warmth and good feeling, the happy use of virtuosity to beguile rather than to impress.

The Borodin Scherzo is a slight thing, though full of charm; this music pales by comparison with the two Debussy works, *La Soirée dans Grenade* (from the collection *Estampes*) and *Poissons d'or* (from the Second Series of *Images*).[2] Familiar though these great *morceaux* may be to pianists, their musical content is rich in both harmonic complexity and resonant emotion. This music, written in the first decade of this century, is very much of our time—not just in its sound

2 A word of caution to the listener: The order of the two Debussy pieces which begin the second side of the record is reversed on both the record jacket and the record label. The first selection actually heard is the *Poissons d'or,* and the second is *La Soirée dans Grenade.*

Gabriel Laderman

Tuula (African Shadow)
36" x 28", oil on canvas, 1984

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but in its influence on subsequent writing. In this music perhaps more than in any other, Viñes's playing fully deserves George Painter's comment, quoted above, that "the pianist, his head buried in the keyboard, seemed to confide a secret to the composer." The secret—one which every listener to this record will penetrate—is that performer and composer, though in fact separate people, are by the alchemy of art here made one. Viñes combines accurate rhythm, always a difficult problem in Debussy, with soft-edged yet crystalline piano tone; the result, curiously enough, is to emphasize the strength of the music as mood rather than design.

Sadly, great performance can only teach us all that it knows when its genius is employed in the communication of the greatest music. And so as the Viñes LP progresses to its end, winding down from the masterworks of Debussy through Falla's piquant and often touching evocations of Diaghilev's Russian Ballet *à l'espagnol,* eventually arriving (in the pieces by Turina, Blancafort, Lopez-Buchardo, and Troiani) at a music of the purest temporary diversion, one must once again regret that so little of Viñes's repertory was recorded. To say this is not to deny that refined pleasure may be gained even from trifling music when it is played with as much sophistication as it is here; it is only to sigh for a lost opportunity.

It is the fashion, when writing about old records, to stress what can be learned from them by today's performers. Doubtless the best of these disks—in this case the playing of Ricardo Viñes—encapsulates formidable triumphs of technical and musical virtue. Technique and style are here indeed admirable—but are they transferable to today's very different world of music and music-making? I very much doubt it, for in such a transfer it is very difficult to avoid a soulless imitation, a copying which always results in the exaggeration of contingent and irrelevant epiphenomena rather than in the authentic re-creation of something vital which had been lost. Indeed, just such attempts to replicate "romanticism" in instrumental and vocal performance seem to do no more than at their best reach the level of a musical *Arsenic and Old Lace.*

Perhaps what is to be gained from the recorded evidence of such playing as that of Ricardo Viñes—in addition to pure pleasure—is the knowledge that piano music in performance could once upon a time be so personal, so immediate, and so touching. To know that the possibility once existed is to know that it might exist again. That would be an inspiration to composers, performers, and audience alike. And in matters of art, inspiration, while hardly enough, is the essential precondition.

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Books

Getting Stoned

by Bruce Bawer

Children of Light, Robert Stone's fourth novel, takes its title from Robert Lowell's 1944 poem of the same name.[1] This short, not particularly well-known poem—which also provided the title for Stone's first novel, *A Hall of Mirrors* (1966)—paints a horrific picture of an American apocalypse:

> Our Fathers wrung their bread from stocks and stones
> And fenced their gardens with the Redman's bones;
> Embarking from the Nether Land of Holland,
> Pilgrims unhouseled by Geneva's night,
> You planted here the Serpent's seeds of light;
> And here the pivoting searchlights probe to shock
> The riotous glass houses built on rock,
> And candles gutter in a hall of mirrors,
> And light is where the ancient blood of Cain
> Is burning, burning the unburied grain.

In its nightmarishly surreal, aggressively "visionary," and rather overwrought images of mirrors, lights, and blood; in its preoccupation with violence and evil, history and religion; and above all in its fanatically held conviction that modern America (of the arrogant, destructive Puritan heritage) is the scourge of the world as well as its own worst enemy, Lowell's poem might justly be viewed as something of a touchstone not only for Robert Stone's new novel but for his entire *oeuvre.* Like Lowell's poem, Stone's novels want to tell us what it *really* means to be an American, what it *really* means to live in the twentieth century.

Except in *A Hall of Mirrors,* Stone's way of approaching the task of defining the word "American" is similar to that of James, of Hemingway, and of Fitzgerald in *Tender is the Night*: he sets his Americans down on some foreign stage and lets us observe them in action against the sharply contrasting backdrop. Unlike those writers, though, he dispatches his characters not to the Continent but to various places in the U.S. sphere of influence: in the National Book Award-winning *Dog Soldiers* (1974), to Vietnam; in *A Flag for Sunrise* (1981), to Central America; in *Children of Light,* to Mexico. Each of these three novels, at or near its opening, introduces us to a protagonist with a heroic-sounding WASP name: in *Dog Soldiers,* John Converse; in *A Flag for Sunrise,* Frank Holliwell; and in *Children of Light,* Gordon Walker. But these are no heroes. Once upon a time, to be sure, they might have had the stuff of thoughtful, sensitive Great American Heroes, but now they're all jaded, unappetizing, directionless, dead-end messes. Modern American life, you see, has so bummed them out, desensitized them, that they've gotten to the point of cultivating raw, dangerous, amoral thrills just so they'll be able to feel *something.*

Converse, for instance, a has-been play-

1 *Children of Light,* by Robert Stone. Knopf; 256 pages, $17.95.

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wright who goes to Vietnam as a reporter, has by the beginning of *Dog Soldiers* lost faith in art and truth and has descended into the grubby world of cocaine trafficking, which he feels is "the first real thing I ever did in my life." Holliwell, in the opening pages of *A Flag for Sunrise,* refuses a CIA offer to do some spying in the mythical Central American nation of Tecan, where a revolution is brewing; but "really without beliefs, without hope—either for himself or for the world," he wanders down there anyway, irrationally drawn to the incipient violence. Likewise, Rheinhart, the down-and-out but intelligent protagonist of *A Hall of Mirrors,* sells out his former values by tying up with a New Orleans radio station run by reactionary, hate-mongering Bible-thumpers. Why are these men so demoralized? Well, Converse's writing career has dried up and he's seen the horrors of war; Rheinhart is down on his luck; and Holliwell—well, it's not too clear what's troubling Holliwell, apart from a so-so marriage and a mild case of Cheeveresque middle-class malaise. But Stone conditions us not to expect a motivation for his protagonists' ***nada, nada, nada*** state of mind; we are patently meant to understand that, hey, this is what it means to be an American in our time.

Stone's first three novels—I'll return presently to *Children of Light,* which represents a marked departure from all this—chronicle these men's nervous, mindless, increasingly inchoate odysseys across the Waste Land of the American Century. The ***mise-en-scène*** in each hovers between the terrain of mainstream realism and a kind of bush-league Baudelairean dreamscape; the narrative is suspenseful, crisply written, and well plotted one minute and weighted down with execrable prose, dull rhetoric, and pretentious symbolism the next; and the ***dramatis personae*** are uniformly repulsive. Both *Dog Soldiers* and *A Flag for Sunrise* feature prominent characters (named Ray Hicks and Pablo Tabor, respectively) who are so relentlessly subhuman that they come close to making our degenerate protagonists (whose paths they eventually cross) look like actual heroes. And rounding out the seamy crew, in these two books and *A Hall of Mirrors,* are assorted pimps, pushers, con men, child-killers, gun-runners, scandal-sheet editors, sleazy homosexuals, corrupt cops, and trampy women with names like Margo and Deedee. There is no question but that, to Stone, these folks are us; his intent is to hold the mirror, as 't were, up to ***homo Americanus*** (which helps explain why mirrors—some of them piled high with cocaine—and reflective eyes and sunglasses are ubiquitous in his work), and as far as he's concerned, apparently, he's got us down to a T.

"The purpose of fiction," he says in an interview in the current *Paris Review,* "is to help us answer the question we must constantly be asking ourselves: Who do we think we are and what do we think we're doing?" Clearly, what we Americans are, in Stone's view, is lost, and what we are doing is drugs, drugs, and more drugs—everything from alcohol, marijuana, cocaine, heroin, LSD, benzedrine, Valium, and Ritalin to nitrous oxide, amyl nitrate, and angel dust. It is the rare Stone character, indeed, who is not an alcoholic, dope fiend, or pillhead, and the rare Stone setting—prior to *Children of Light,* anyway—that is not the grubby underbelly of a city or the godless emptiness of a desert or jungle. One after another of Stone's characters, moreover, is as loony as a jaybird—which, in Stone's world, is both a horrible and a wonderful thing, at once an indictment of the system and a sort of apotheosis. For Stone's drugged and psychotic characters, in the tradition of the Beats (who were an important influence upon him), are inspired, delirious, insightful; they have gorgeous visions, hear disembodied voices, perceive great truths, and receive pseudo-transcendental intimations of cosmic determinism (Pablo: "There's a process and I'm in the middle of it. A lot of stuff I do is meant to be"). There's also a fair amount of tiresome and fatuous carrying-on about Karma, Nirvana, Zen, and so forth.

And there's talk of God and the devil, too. Figures of Christ—bizarre, defaced, or nightmarishly distorted—appear in at least

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two books. Even more frequently invoked is Satan. At the beginning of *Dog Soldiers,* Converse tells a religious American lady in a Saigon park that he doesn't believe in Satan, and she replies: "It's always surprised me . . . things being what they are and all, that people find it so difficult to believe in Satan." Similarly, in *A Flag for Sunrise,* Father Egan —one of the several clergymen who appear in Stone's first three books—declares that "Satan is the way things are. Remember Mephistopheles, eh? 'Why this is hell nor are we out of it.'" As for the deity, Stone says in *The Paris Review* that "I feel a very deep connection to the existentialist tradition of God as an absence—not a meaningless void, but a negative presence we live in terms of." This view of God is reflected in the novels. Arriving in Central America in *A Flag for Sunrise,* Holliwell finds himself in "a world far from God." When he gives a besotted, negativistic lecture at a university, a woman stands up in the audience:

> "What about God?" she demanded in an Australian quaver. "Is there a place for God in all this?" Holliwell realized gratefully that she must be as drunk as he.
>
> "There's always a place for God, señora. There is some question as to whether He's in it."

At times, then, Stone's picture of the twentieth century makes *Heart of Darkness* look like a ride at Disneyland. And this, alas, is the main problem with his first three books. For, despite their considerable dramatic and stylistic merits, their effectiveness is hampered beyond salvation by a conception of postwar American life that partakes less of literary vision (as many critics would have it) than of facile political cliché. "What I'm always trying to do," Stone tells his *Paris Review* interlocutor, "is define that process in American life that puts people in a state of anomie, of frustration. The national promise is so great that a tremendous bitterness is evoked by its elusiveness. That was Fitzgerald's subject, and it's mine." But Stone doesn't really define any characteristically American "process" in these books; his characters are anomic and frustrated from the beginning, their motivations dubious or nonexistent, their psychology rudimentary and inconsistent. Unlike Gatsby, say, they never grow in the imagination, either as people or as symbols; with few exceptions, they refuse to come into focus, to bring the force and depth and color of actual humanity to the novels.

This is especially true of the characters in Stone's biggest, sloppiest, and most ambitious novel, *A Flag for Sunrise.* So factitious is their behavior that they remind one less of real people than of cinematic stereotypes. And movies, indeed, in this book at least, seem to have captured Stone's imagination more thoroughly than human life. There are echoes here of everything from *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* to *To Have and Have Not* to *Casablanca* (one almost expects Holliwell to tell Sister Justin that the lives of two people don't amount to a hill of beans in this crazy world). Those passages that Stone obviously means to be among the strongest—for instance, the one in which a Tecanecan police lieutenant shows a Catholic priest, Father Egan, the dead American girl he's been keeping in his food freezer, under the ice and beer—generally don't work as fiction: they're sensational, they're contrived, they lack a solid emotional center. But they would probably be quite effective in a film, in which powerful visual content can disguise a paucity of logic or shallowness of characterization. One cannot help thinking that this is what Stone (who wrote the screenplays for the films *WUSA* and *Who'll Stop the Rain?,* based on his first two novels, and who hankers to direct) had in mind.

If there remains any doubt about Stone's fascination with movies, his new novel should settle the question once and for all. This is not to say that *Children of Light* reminds one more of movies than of real life. On the contrary, it is by far Stone's most realistic achievement, an admirably accomplished literary work that, in style and scope, is surprisingly different from its monstrous

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and messy immediate predecessor. For once, Stone seems as interested in his characters as in what they represent, as intent upon telling a story as upon Making a Statement (or an Impression). To be sure, the song remains much the same: like Stone's previous novels, this is a story of doomed, disturbed, and naïvely self-destructive Americans making their narcotized way in a forlorn century. Our anti-hero, Gordon Walker, is an alcoholic Hollywood writer who, having been deserted by his second wife, considers heading for the small Baja California coastal town of Bahía Honda. There a movie company is shooting a film based on his screenplay of Kate Chopin's turn-of-the-century novel *The Awakening*. The film's star is Lu Anne Bourgois, a Louisianan whose stage name is Lee Verger; she's Walker's ex-lover and alter ego, and has "a smile that quiver[s] between high drollery and madness." Lu Anne is not without her share of problems: she's a schizophrenic, and has recently gone off the medication that she takes to keep her nocturnal voices quiet; she's been abandoned, perhaps for good, by her husband Lionel; and her role in the movie is a very demanding one that may well derail her.

At the beginning of the novel, Walker awakens—hung over, lonely, in bed with someone whose name it takes him a moment to remember. Splashing water on his face in the kitchen, he looks out the window and sees, so to speak, the deceitful, smiling promise of the American dream:

> It was a shimmering day, dappled with promise.
>
> "Fucking California," he said aloud. He was still half drunk.
>
> Even after twenty years he was not immune to California mornings. He supposed they must represent the pursuit of happiness to him.
>
> He closed his eyes and gripped the sink. His eyes were swollen. They want pennies, he thought. Pennies over them.

Thinking of the lost days of his young manhood, he has "a vision of his life as trash—a soiled article, past repair," and wonders "if he had ever had the slightest acquaintance with any kind of truth." He has a California breakfast: Vitamin B, Valium, vodka mixed with tomato and clam juice, cocaine. He looks at the woman in his bed and contemplates "the murderous fantasies that assai[l] him—of destroying her, transforming her supple youth to offal, trashing it." But immediately he feels "remorse and horror" at these thoughts. He thinks of Lu Anne, whom he loves, and remembers when they were "young and fearless, in the days of mind drugs and transfiguration"; his career since then has been "disappointing." Nonetheless, he makes very good money for his scripts, is offered lucrative movie roles as "faggoty intellectual villains" and the like, and lately has been doing *King Lear*, no less, for which he got a nice write-up in the L.A. *Times*. (Stone too has acted in *Lear*.) But he's destroying himself with drink and drugs. And he knows somehow that, if he goes down to Bahía Honda, he will also destroy Lu Anne, "his dark angel":

> They had survived their last outing but it had been close. They had survived because they were both young then and married [not to each other, naturally] and motivated and skilled survivors. It would not be the same now.

But, triply stoned, he puts aside his realization that "[w]hat we need here is less craziness" and decides instead that "[a] dream is what I need. Fire, motion, risk." He decides to go to Bahía Honda.

He does not get there till the middle of the book; in the meantime we are introduced to Lu Anne and her co-workers. These folks include Walter Drogue, Junior, the film's artistically ambitious yet modestly cultured director; Walter Drogue, Senior, a legendary director with a John Huston-like combination of earthiness and cultivation; Dongan Lowndes, the hulking has-been novelist, brilliant and vitriolic, who's doing a magazine story on the movie; and Joy McIntyre, Lu Anne's beautiful, empty-headed stand-in who, we are meant to recognize,

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stands a good chance of sleeping her way into a starring part someday. Though, like the characters of Stone's previous books, they are a less than charming bunch, they do manage to come alive, to earn our interest and sympathy—some of them impressively so. Perhaps Stone's most unequivocal accomplishment in *Children of Light,* in fact, is his convincing depiction of day-to-day life on location—the relationships, the conflicts, the creative and personal tensions; his descriptive gift, his eye for detail (one is, amazingly enough, almost tempted to say his *affectionate* eye for detail) has never been more in evidence. Nor has his gift for dialogue: the conversations of these people almost never ring false. Take, for example, the dialogue between Walker and his agent Al Avakian, who talks about cutting the *Awakening* deal with Drogue, Junior:

> "Walter was worried about the absence of a feminist perspective. He gave us a lot of shit about this. Know what was on his mind?"
>
> "I can guess."
>
> Avakian smiled thinly.
>
> "He wanted a writing credit. Not for some broad—for him. He saw the script was good. He thinks the thing might go. He wanted a writing credit for his vanity and to jack more points out of them."
>
> "Well," Walker said. "Walter's a great feminist."
>
> "Definitely," Al said. "One of the greatest. If not the greatest. That fucking ball would have rolled seven ways from sundown but it would have stopped on a writing credit for Walter Drogue. We were able to checkmate these numbers. We saved your points and credit."

When Walker arrives in Bahía Honda, he picks up where he left off years ago with Lu Anne. One begins to be reminded here of *The Sun Also Rises*: it is almost as if the gringo bullfight fans in Hemingway's Pamplona have been transformed into a movie company, as if the world-weary lovers Jake Barnes and Lady Brett—hungry for one another but, due to tragic circumstances beyond their control, unable to satiate that

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hunger—have metamorphosed into Walker and Lu Anne. Hemingway's lucid, understated, dialogue-heavy style may well have influenced Stone here; and the same may be said of his stoic *Weltanschauung*. For, like *The Sun Also Rises, Children of Light* is dripping with despair, emotional wreckage, the meaninglessness of life; but like that novel, too—and unlike Stone's previous novels—it considers its essential responsibility to be the forging of some sort of meaning out of chaos, the discovery of a beautiful shape amidst all the wreckage. Reading Stone's previous novels, one felt that, if people were truly like *this,* they would hardly be worth writing about; reading *Children of Light* provokes quite different sentiments. For the first time, one is persuaded that Stone *believes* in life, in art, in the value—even the heroism—of the daily struggle to connect and to create.

Of course, this novel does have extraliterary "points" to make, ideas to communicate. Like many another serious Hollywood novel, it is out to depict the movie colony as symbolic in some way of modern America. (Its nicely double-edged title tells one that much.) These movie people, we are meant to understand, do not know art from trash, and are therefore perfectly suited to provide entertainment for a tacky populace whose every new housing development consists of "mock villages centered on a supermarket and a Bob's Big Boy." Walker and Lu Anne, though—he with his *Lear* and Couperin on the car radio, she with her references to *As You Like It* and *Antony and Cleopatra*—are different. They're real artists, noble spirits; it's their tragic flaw. "There are people at this table," Walker says at a party in Bahía Honda, "who can vulgarize pure light." The theme is a familiar one, of course, which many a writer with Stone's track record would be liable to treat in a superficial, polemical fashion. But Stone, thank goodness—though he offers up the requisite illustrations of movie-colony nepotism, drug-taking, phoniness, promiscuity, and backbiting—does not lean on this theme as heavily as he would have done in the past. There is no fashionable nihilism here, no inane sermonizing about the system. Indeed, next to a book like West's *The Day of the Locust,* the view of Hollywood reflected in *Children of Light* is rather temperate.

Why so temperate? Part of the answer, I believe, is the influence of Chopin's *The Awakening* (which, you'll remember, is the basis for Walker's movie). Like that novel, *Children of Light* is short, understated, elegantly shaped and focused, arrestingly elliptical. Chopin's book is extremely evocative (before the feminists captured her, she was generally grouped with the local-color movement), and Stone's atmosphere, as I have said, is very fine too. Among other things, his book, like Chopin's, reverberates with what Chopin refers to as the "seductive . . . voice of the sea."

There are, moreover, striking parallels between Stone's story and Chopin's. So important are these parallels that it is expedient at this point, I think, to summarize the plot of *The Awakening.* It is about Edna Pontellier, a New Orleans wife in her late twenties who, as the novel opens, is spending a summer on the resort island of Grand Isle among the rich, sophisticated Creole friends of her Creole husband Léonce. The Creoles, we learn, are people who can flirt without taking it to heart—unlike Edna, whose upbringing was old-fashioned. Thus it is that she responds to the attentions of a young man named Robert Lebrun by falling in love; and thus it is that, after Robert honorably goes off to Mexico to put some distance between them, she quickly grows apart from Léonce, cultivating her artistic talents, neglecting her housework and children, befriending a bohemian pianist named Mademoiselle Reisz, and romancing a man-about-town named Alcée Arobin. Eventually Edna takes a house of her own, and thinks herself independent and fulfilled. But, once Robert makes it clear that he considers her already taken, and will therefore never be her lover, she returns to Grand Isle, goes swimming—which earlier symbolized her "freedom"—and drowns herself.

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The Awakening has been read, in recent years, as a proto-feminist manifesto. But Stone, like Gordon Walker, seems rather to view it (rightly, in my opinion) as having a more complex, more purely human concern—namely, to portray the woeful consequences of a conventionally reared young woman's introduction to a more "modern" way of life. This, in fact, is what *Children of Light,* in part, seems to portray as well. As Creole society shatters Edna's sense of self (and of values), so Hollywood has gone a long way toward shattering Lu Anne's; both women are down-home Louisiana types whose attempts at being "Mrs. Pontellier," Creole wife, and "Lee Verger," Hollywood star, are doomed to failure. (Stone presents a similar conflict in *A Flag for Sunrise,* whose heroine, born May Feeney, feels she can no longer carry on as Sister Justin.) Edna tends to have morbid thoughts: "There were days when she was unhappy, she did not know why,—when it did not seem worthwhile to be glad or sorry, to be alive or dead; when life appeared to her like a grotesque pandemonium and humanity like worms struggling blindly toward inevitable annihilation." Lu Anne is also capable of seeing life in this fashion; "I guess we were going to die," she says when she and Walker narrowly escape the Grim Reaper. "What's wrong with that?" Léonce and Lionel (whose names are, of course, equivalent) are similar as well; though decent and loving, both are rather ineffectual types, inclined to run away from trouble. Robert and Walker, however —the lovers who go away and return—are distinct opposites: whereas Robert's virtue, his sense of honor and responsibility, triggers Edna's suicide, it is Walker's deficient sense of honor and responsibility—as typified by his readiness to join Lu Anne, in the closing pages of the book, in a manic quest for existential epiphany and preternatural self-realization—that is largely to blame for her unhappy fate.

Which brings us, at last, to what is perhaps the principal theme in *Children of Light:* the relation between reality and illusion, between literal and artistic truth. This theme has always been a concern of Stone's, but never before has it seemed much more than a pretext for pretentious chatter. But *Children of Light* is different. At its heart is Lu Anne's struggle with the role of Edna: in true Method-actress fashion, she wants to "become" the character as fully as she can, final suicidal passion and all, while at the same time trying desperately to distinguish life from fantasy, to hang on to her slippery sense of self, and to silence her imaginary voices.

It's a harrowing, credibly delineated conflict, and the climax—wherein she and Walker visit a remote mountain which she sees as a "holy place," but of which he says, "There's nothing here"—affectingly brings the conflict to a head. The episode is reminiscent of the climactic mountaintop scene of *Dog Soldiers,* in which the principal characters fight over some cocaine, and Hicks, in what is apparently meant as a life-affirming gesture, throws the stuff down the mountain. Here, too, Lu Anne flings Walker's cocaine and Quaaludes away on the mountaintop—but the act is much more believable here, coming off not as a piece of transparent authorial theme-mongering but as a compassionate human act. By the time these climactic pages have come to a close, nearly every one of Stone's favorite themes and conceits—lights and mirrors, truth and God, love and violence—has been dragged onstage; and what's remarkable is that it all works. Indeed, at the end, one finds oneself reminded of *The Great Gatsby,* of all things—and the comparison is not without merit. For, though *Children of Light* is hardly in that novel's league, its conclusion has the same dark, hauntingly resonant quality. Stone approaches Fitzgerald's tragic sense of the grandeur of human feeling, of the imperfectibility of art and love, of the need to compromise with dreams and carry on. Despite Stone's inability, then, to divest himself entirely of the myopic "vision" and modish clichés that weakened his earlier novels, *Children of Light* represents an encouraging step away from tedious polemic and in the direction of art.

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"A singular institution"

Robert Fitzgerald Enlarging the Change. Northeastern University Press, 249 pages, $19.95

reviewed by Sonya Rudikoff

The desire to start something new is so familiar and appealing that few people can remain unresponsive to it. A new magazine, a new college, a new community, a new society—these projects stir visions of felicity, of life lived differently, of inspired new personal relations, social awakening, and spiritual improvement. Even modest plans for new ventures share in the large hope generated by pioneers, missionaries, and dreamers in the abounding faith of the early colonists, or of the founders of towns, colleges, and industries. Naturally, a sour realism may overtake the evangelical impulse: the fellowship of the new spirit, with all things held in common, can prove fragile, the communities of the like-minded may be threatened by conflicts of personality and ideology. Inevitably, people become wise and self-protective about the hazards of new communities, about the unrecoverable expense of resources and spirit that such projects demand. How long is it since anyone wanted to start a new college? Even to start a new magazine has become heroic: think of the determination and execution of policy, the administrative and organizational problems, the financing, the distribution, all the important intricate details not mentioned in that e.e. cummings poem of so many years ago:

> "let's start a magazine . . .
>
> lousy with pure
> reeking with stark
> and fearlessly obscene . . . ."

The classic failure of utopian communities and other new ventures was a failure to clarify their succession, governance, and procedures. In the Sixties, new communities gave little thought to the future, so intoxicated were they with their rejection of the past, and, as they thought, with their unprecedented grasp of the present. The new self-created beings of the communes were emphatically not heirs or testators, so they could not act as trustees of a mission proclaimed by others before them and transmissible to those coming after. Such indifference was not unique, but typical. More recently, the discussions about "the New York intellectuals" show a similarly exclusive preoccupation with ideology and personality. Attention focuses on fabulous "characters," on their combative or narcissistic style, their hilarious or deadly encounters. Other more important questions are not asked, such as whether their work could be carried on by another generation, whatever the manners or personal histories; or, did their efforts insure that everything ended with them? Doesn't any group need to settle what it bequeaths to the future, and by whom, if it is to continue? Perhaps the organizing procedures are as important as the ideas?

Some of these problems and their implications are illuminated in a recently published account of the creation of a new intellectual community. Written by the late Robert Fitzgerald, the noted poet and translator, this report on the early years of the Princeton Seminars in Literary Criticism (now widely known as the Gauss Seminars), was produced in 1951 for a faculty committee, and for the Rockefeller Foundation, which had provided some support. Fitzgerald's history of the years 1949-1951, and of the persons involved in the new venture, was duly written and submitted; it languished in his files until a few years ago, when a friend suggested it might have a wider interest, as it does. He revised it, and it was published before his death in 1985. This particular new intellectual community was not created in a cultural desert, but in an existing academic setting, two centuries old, where there already were clubs, societies, departments of learning, and other groupings, formal and informal. These, however, did not provide either the appropriate personnel

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or discourse or opportunities or ambiance for the kind of intellectual community that Christian Gauss, a professor of modern languages at Princeton and dean, wanted to bring into being. It was not to be simply a group of friends such as might meet in a café or restaurant, or in political gatherings, or in the offices of charitable foundations or literary quarterlies. It was to be larger, more serious, more systematic, less accidental than such groups, less casual even if less intense.

Gauss was a thoughtful, self-made literary scholar from the Middle West, esteemed highly by generations of Princeton students; Edmund Wilson, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and John Peale Bishop revered him, but they were not the only ones. His administrative gifts were notable, he was devoted to learning, he was not a snob or a fool. It was Gauss who had inaugurated the Creative Arts Program at Princeton, at a time when only the advanced or progressive colleges treated creative art and literature as serious academic subjects.

In 1939, Gauss had hired the Southern poet, Allen Tate, for the Creative Arts Program, and, through Tate, Richard Blackmur came to Princeton, where he would remain until his death in 1965. Blackmur, a poet and critic of central importance to the New Criticism, was not an academic but a writer, an alumnus of various Cambridge bookstores, and, significantly, of *Hound & Horn,* the "little magazine" of the Twenties inspired by T. S. Eliot's *The Criterion.* Blackmur was "editing manager" of *Hound & Horn,* and his own intellectual position was formed by it, and representative of it: avant-garde and classical at once, learned, commanding, and ironic. It would be hard to overestimate the importance of *Hound & Horn* in understanding the cast of mind of those friends, those days. Robert Fitzgerald had known Blackmur in Cambridge during the Thirties, and had also known Francis Fergusson, the other major literary figure associated with the early Gauss Seminars. Fergusson was not an academic person either: his intellectual and creative life had been in the theater, and at Bennington, where he had taught literature and drama and directed the College's experimental theater. Both Fergusson and Blackmur would also spend time at the Institute for Advanced Study—Fergusson's major work, *The Idea of a Theater,* was completed there—and some members of the Institute would participate in the Seminars. Links between the two institutions were appropriate: in the Thirties, the Institute had provided intellectual shelter in a new community, especially for refugee scholars exiled from totalitarian countries abroad.

Like Fergusson and Blackmur, Fitzgerald was not exactly an academic person: he translated the *Odyssey,* the *Iliad,* the *Aeneid,* he would be for many years Boylston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory at Harvard; but writers like Fitzgerald—or John Berryman or William Meredith, who were also in the Seminars then—considered that "they were poets if they were anything." Literature was a *calling* for them, not an occupation or profession. The university was unknown and alien territory for such writers, and they were alien to the academic setting. Nothing could be more poignant and revealing about such attitudes of the time than Fitzgerald's observations about René Wellek, the literary historian, who gave a magisterial set of seminars in literary criticism. At dinner before the seminar, Fitzgerald, the poet and inspired translator, expected to talk about poetry, as if among poets. Wellek was absorbed in questions of TIAA (a university retirement plan), and university appointments and politics, and spoke of these matters as if among academics. A man of prodigious knowledge, Wellek had been born in Prague, molded by European and English traditions of learning, and was experienced in the American university world. A master of the library stacks, author of one of the major works in modern criticism, *Theory of Literature* (with Austin Warren), he impressed Fitzgerald as strong and agreeable; he could have been a doctor or lawyer. The poet missed in the scholar what Blackmur would have called the stigmata of the writer: the contrast was between poetry as a writer's

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calling and the study of poetry as a professional calling. The free-floating intellectuals of the Gauss Seminars, alighting only temporarily in the academy, as they thought, could still range themselves at a distance from literature as a profession and from this representative of the scholarly tradition. The image Wellek conveyed was at variance with Blackmur's: the French and Bohemian heritage, Charles University, Princeton, London, Yale, as against the world of the autodidact whose mother took in boarders, the self-created poet and critic of a more dissident, modern inspiration.

Wellek and Blackmur were of the same generation. So was Fergusson, who differed from both of them: his learning, his Harvard and Oxford years, his work in the theater, had made his a more mobile intellectual temper, improvisational, histrionic rather than professional. Fergusson, Blackmur, Berryman, Tate, Fitzgerald himself, and many of their friends certainly belonged to the ambiance of experimental groups, new visions, and new communities, not to the rigorously structured academic world of Wellek's eminence. These different versions of the literary calling, with their sources in the complex history of intellectual life, should be distinguished also from the hermetic occupation of "literary studies" so widespread in contemporary academic life.

Early members of the Seminars included Erich Auerbach and Ernst Robert Curtius, the great European scholars at the Institute for Advanced Study; Jacques Maritain, Erich Kahler, and Erwin Panofsky were in Princeton as well. Fitzgerald first came on the scene as part of the Creative Arts Program, then he was invited to give a seminar and to participate in the others. A year later he wrote up his report. When he looked at it again, decades later, and thought about the whole institution of the Seminars and their intellectual mission, he was not without a highly sophisticated awareness of differences between the first inspired vision and its later evolution. But the obvious changes in the Seminars—"a singular institution still very much alive"—were not of pressing concern to him. Perhaps the Wallace Stevens epigraph from which he chose his title indicates the vitality Fitzgerald saw in 1951 and confirmed thirty-odd years later when he rewrote his report for publication:

> He observes how the north is always enlarging the change,
> With its frigid brilliances, its blue-red sweeps
> And gusts of great enkindlings . . .

Fitzgerald's was not a personal memoir, curious as that may seem now, when the autobiographical mode seems so compelling for those who summon the past; and, although people are described and characterized, the point was to recall the "singular institution," not singular personages. One of the few vignettes of personal remembrances Fitzgerald did include in his account was the moment in his own seminar when, after "an avowed Platonist" challenged his discussion of Aristotle, Fitzgerald's "left-wing intellectual friend," Irving Howe, expressed irritation with the perennial philosophical problem of the table: what more did Fitzgerald want to know about the table in front of him that he didn't already know? Fitzgerald found this a "surprising and not very welcome diversion." When another friend, Delmore Schwartz, gave a seminar on T. S. Eliot, Fitzgerald could not be present; in 1951, the notes for it no longer existed. According to reports, the seminar had been thin, even weak, and the discussion unrewarding. The book on T. S. Eliot was never written, despite Schwartz's affinity for the subject, and its strengths could be only imagined, not actually known.[1]

It was a new intellectual venture but of course no new institution is ever created from the beginning; every one of them—schools, colleges, magazines, societies, religious

1 If the later practice of taping the seminars had been in effect, the Schwartz seminars might not have vanished into the hazards of memory. Taping was discontinued in 1978, after a period of about nine years.

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groups—implies the existence of a developed form, even a tradition, which requires renewal or change. And so it was with the Gauss Seminars. What the members of this new society held in common were certain habits of mind, predispositions in discourse, and the belief that art and literature were serious undertakings, also the belief that science was within the grasp of an educated person. It was a time when intellectuals could still take all knowledge as their province, or could think they could. Thirty-five years have seen an increase in specialization, in general fragmentation and disconnectedness, even affecting the polymaths among us. Our contemporaries feel that they have no colleagues, not enough people who share assumptions or intellectual experience; what is desired is not agreement with one's opinions so much as willingness to entertain shared questions. In the early days of the Gauss Seminars, the group could feel a certain continuity in assumptions, in methods of discourse, in necessary questions. It was not that they all shared a knowledge of Schiller, Ibsen, Homer, or the Latin poets, or Dante, Baudelaire, or Goethe, or Pascal, or Job, Proust, and Aristotle. What really mattered was that everyone knew what those writers had meant and knew it was worth knowing. There was a tone that participants came to expect, a practiced, even predictable character, a framing of intellectual problems. The advantage of this expectation was very great, and the accrued experience of the group's highly skilled, knowledgeable, continuous style structured what was presented and received. The element of performance on these occasions was naturally significant, and in fact the group's response always had in it some nuance of a theatrical troupe trying out a new work, making it their own.

A different kind of performance may be more highly valued now, a more individual, spontaneous, more charismatic expression, which would appear to guarantee originality and "real feeling." One of the received ideas of recent years asserts that whatever is truly advanced needs to break through existing structures, offending the virtuosi of skill and

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performance. Hostility and ignorance are thus the predictable responses, at least if the model is late nineteenth-century French culture, as it so often is. Obviously, learned, seasoned, skilled groups may not always welcome new ideas with alacrity, but only the modern ideology about art would insist that the very resistance or indifference also certifies the value of what is being presented. Both in the early years of the Seminars, and throughout the later period, the very tradition which was the Seminars' strength occasionally prevented the discussion from being sufficiently porous to admit contradictions of itself. The Schwartz seminars that failed to elicit a rewarding discussion were such an occasion. When Clement Greenberg, the art critic, presented arguments in support of the then relatively unfamiliar painting style, Abstract Expressionism, he failed to persuade many of the participants, who were either ignorant of the art or not willing to accommodate it to their own well-developed views about painting. Nor did Greenberg's stubborn insistence on his own judgment enhance his persuasiveness. Similarly, Kingsley Amis, the British novelist, summoned his mordant wit and truculent evangelism to argue the value of science fiction; but veteran readers of Tolstoy, Mann, James, Proust, Jane Austen, Joyce, and George Eliot were not convinced that they should make much room for Amis's favorites. Since the early days, a similar wariness often greeted the work of many scholars from fields other than art and literature. Paul Lazarsfeld, Jürgen Habermas, Sidney Mintz, Marshall Sahlins, Mary Douglas, and other non-literary scholars all presented work which was less familiar, less available to the verbal discursive grasp known to those in the Seminars. A certain insularity could show itself, perhaps as an inevitable concomitant of a structured group. And the interest or liveliness of the discussion could not be exactly correlated either with the value or the originality of the work presented.

Women were not welcome at the Seminars, even when well-known intellectuals such as Hannah Arendt or Nathalie Sarraute presented their work, although a very few individual women made themselves part of the group; but their absence was not peculiar to the Seminars, inasmuch as women were almost invisible at Princeton altogether until the Seventies. Graduate students were not welcome either, and there were other categories of undesirables. As if to trump the academics, Blackmur tended to run the Seminars like a private club, or his own personal fiefdom, almost continuous with his regular dining group from Lahiere's, the French restaurant nearby. Beleaguered, excluded, and, to some, a questionable person for an English Department, he could never forget his patchwork education, self-designed and self-administered. Traditional academic procedures offended or mystified him, and he in turn offended people who valued them. Only the most sympathetic of academics were invited to share in those colloquies over which Blackmur presided in his elaborately mannered, quixotic way.

Fitzgerald conjured up a typical Seminar evening: say, a warm evening in the spring, a Thursday, toward 8:30 p.m., with people clustering in the appointed room, the table at the front, chairs arranged in rows, the director and the speaker, with others, arriving from dinner at Lahiere's. It would be one of six weekly seminars presented by a single person. The form of the evening, then as now, was explicit: an hour's presentation, a break of ten minutes, then an hour's discussion. Blackmur, and successive directors, would show their gifts in the discussion, guiding and responding to questions with finesse and acuity, not always entirely benign. Some members of the seminar did, and still do, express their crotchets, obsessions, idiosyncrasies, *idées fixes*. The directors, orchestrating the discussion, conducting the ensemble, would hope to forestall or prevent isolating aggrandizing intellectual habits from distorting the course of the evening. It would have been unlikely in these gatherings—although familiar enough elsewhere—for someone to deliver a sermon, or climb on a table to utter maledictions, or to expound at length a prophetic philosophy

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that annihilated all opposing views. After the seminar, the participants might have repaired to the director's house, for further conversation and drinks. In recent years, the informal ending to the symposium has taken place immediately after the discussion, in a gallery or open hall outside the lecture room.

The group is too large now for a Thursday evening in anyone's house, and is less restricted, less cohesive. The Seminars have become more like ordinary lectures with question periods; participation is less regular or continuous than in early days, the sense of heroic intellectual purpose is somewhat muted. Commitment to the idea of the Seminars inevitably diminished as the group lost its special character. Certainly the widespread changes in university life must be taken into account here: intellectual communities like the Seminars have been brought into being throughout the country; there are institutes for advanced or special study, centers for research, colloquia of all kinds; able and knowledgeable people direct them or participate in their gatherings and conferences, edit collections of papers, preside on commemorative occasions. There is simply much more of this kind of activity now everywhere: there are many more people available to engage in it.

Fitzgerald's report of his own seminars conveys the typical course of the six evenings of those early days (reduced to three seminars in recent years). His thoughts were stirred by a paper of Blackmur's, "distinguished and humane," which was nevertheless at its center "inadequately realized." The problem of mediating between the creative and the discursive was his subject, between scholarship and art, between practical wisdom and moral or intellectual excellence. Fitzgerald had been present at most of the seminars and could incorporate the previous arguments into his own presentation; also, he was able to weave and re-weave weekly each of the discussions into the texture of those first years. It was in fact Fitzgerald himself who exemplified the original ideal of Gauss, and of Blackmur and Fergusson.

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Despite the hopes of the founders, that continuous intellectual resonance could not develop easily: Wellek was not there for Auerbach's seminars, nor Maritain for Fitzgerald's, nor others for Maritain's and Fergusson's. The much desired intellectual exchange was not predictable, could not be assured or produced at will. Nostalgia for the early days has persuaded some members of the Seminars that those bygone discussions were quite brilliant and fearless, but apparently they were not always memorable, the responses were frequently narrow or unimaginative, the members not always challenged in their thinking. Certainly, it was an important result of Fergusson's seminars on Dante that Blackmur became newly immersed in Dante, and that Fergusson could benefit from the presence of the great Dante scholar and translator, Charles Singleton. Nevertheless, many of Princeton's faculty members who were engaged in similar pursuits remained relatively untouched by the intellectual encounter. Although Fergusson's book on dramatic form was in the process of being written when he gave his seminar, Auerbach had already completed *Mimesis,* and he did not rewrite it in consequence of its Princeton presentation. The accomplishments of those Thursday evenings were fitful, the discussions sometimes failing to "enkindle" anything at all, and stumbling in the creation of that luminous intellectual society envisaged by the founders. Intellectuals could not always respond to one another's concerns. Thus, Auerbach "amused himself by making fun of Fergusson's theory that every canto had the curve of dramatic action . . . . Fergusson, warm but wary, only laughed in reply."

Some of the work tried out at the Seminars and later published would be notable for any institution, formal or informal: Fergusson's on Dante, Auerbach's *Mimesis,* Wellek's four-volume history of criticism, Maritain's *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry,* Erich Kahler on Mann, Mark Schorer on fiction. Those came out of the first few years; the thirty-odd years that followed saw the early or late versions of many other works, among them books by Helen Vendler, Lionel Trilling, Richard Ellmann, Kenneth Burke, Peter Gay, Mary Douglas, Stuart Hampshire, Jaroslav Pelikan, Harold Rosenberg, Carol Gilligan, Michael Walzer, Tzvetan Todorov, Marshall Sahlins, and others. Blackmur himself did not give a seminar, nor did E. B. O. Borgerhoff, but three other directors have done so—Fergusson, Joseph Frank, the critic and biographer of Dostoevsky, whose tenure was the longest of the directors, and Victor Brombert, the current director, a French scholar and the author of a recent work on Victor Hugo. Fitzgerald's report of the first few years, even when rewritten three decades later, did not cast up the gains of the entire period, but more modestly spoke of the "intellectual service" that had been performed by the intellectual community that had once been new and still endured.

It is difficult to reproduce discussions, especially when they are the work of fifteen, twenty, or thirty people. Fitzgerald, of course, would have acknowledged the gulf between his summaries of those early seminars, and a *created,* mimetic account. Conversations at a café or an Italian restaurant, or in the chance groupings of an evening party, can more easily be summoned. The working-out of ideas, the conflicts, contradictions, reinforcements, the elaboration of disagreements—these are more vividly recreated when embodied in a complex fiction, or abstracted further into systematic argument. Recapitulation and summary tend to lose the immediacy of the colloquies without achieving the coherence of an independent text. Platonic dialogues might have provided a model, but that form doesn't merely record thought, it presents it as engaged dramatic action. In these summaries of Fitzgerald's, no one was given the subtly commanding part of Socrates; in fact, the role often played by the directors is minimized. Their presiding style, ironic or provocative, deft or manipulative, could recall the Duke in *Measure for Measure,* or Prospero in *The Tempest.* And in Fitzgerald's account no one was designated for the part

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of Alcibiades, for the histrionic element so important to Platonic dialogues.

Fitzgerald's intention was discursive and descriptive, not creative. A Socratic desire for knowledge, a Socratic humility, and his own critical, skeptical, tentative commentary all abjured the evangelical opportunity. There was no attempt to "promote" these gatherings, or memorialize them, or justify them, or moralize about culture in its entirety, seeing the state of our culture in the intellectual positions taken in the Seminars. Fifteen years after his report, when Fitzgerald gave another seminar, the "singular institution" had changed in many ways, as of course the whole society had done. Even the setting shifted from one building or another, until the School of Architecture became the regular meeting place. Fergusson might have seen dramatic resonance in this setting, and Blackmur would surely have offered an ironic assessment. Perhaps because the University sponsored the Seminars, included them in its budget, allowed space, and facilitated the use of university resources, their fate was not exclusively linked to the fortunes and history of the first directors. But from this American example, no one should generalize too crisply about the role of intellectuals in the university; the matter still remains entangled and complex.

Access to the past

A. N. Wilson Gentlemen in England. Viking, 310 pages, $17.95

reviewed by Donna Rifkind

A. N. Wilson is a somewhat curious figure among contemporary British writers, and he is unlikely to have an exact counterpart in America. We can see throughout his previous books (half a dozen or so novels, a study of Walter Scott, biographies of John Milton and Hilaire Belloc) evidence of a young author eager not only to offer his particular interpretation of English literary tradition, but also, it would seem, to plant himself firmly within it. His is the ambitious and unfashionable goal of granting his readers, through both his fiction and nonfiction, an access to the past. In the tradition of Swift, he shows us worlds that are smaller and farther away than ours with the hope of making us see our own more clearly.

While in any previous era this ambition would seem routine, today it is unusual. Few writers now would praise and try to imitate Hilaire Belloc's "acute power to feel himself into the past," as Wilson does. In contemporary fiction, there is little evidence even of the ironic postures toward past traditions that Wilson adopts in all of his novels. Rather, the impulse tends to push away from acknowledgment of literary history toward a kind of spontaneous generation of fiction, with novels springing from no deeper source than the tireless centers of the authors themselves. It is because of Wilson's acute sense of *place,* of having come from somewhere, that we turn with interest to *Gentlemen in England.*

First, however, a look at two previous novels will provide a bit of background for the technique and subjects of the new book. *Wise Virgin* (1982) is a lugubrious story about a blind medievalist who misses the comfort of the religion he abandoned years ago. Unable to suppress the energy which once fueled his faith, he devotes his later years to the translation of an obscure thirteenth-century handbook for nuns. *Scandal,* published a year later, is a contemporary satire, thick with flippancy, about the sexual misconduct of a member of Parliament. *Gentlemen in England* combines the preoccupation with Christian faith from the former novel with the broad ironic tone of the latter. It is also evidently a serious attempt to be a richer book than any of the author's previous efforts, addressing itself more directly to the question of tradition than the other novels do; in fact, rather than merely expressing interest in the past, Wilson here elects to place his plot squarely in the middle of the Victorian period.

The principal gentleman in this England of 1880 is Horace Nettleship, a professor

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of geology whose expertise is the study of volcanoes. Nettleship resembles the morose scholar of *Wise Virgin* in that his failure to believe in God has become the central tragedy of his life, causing him unrelieved nostalgia for the innocence of his religious days. The crisis occurred some years previously as he chipped away at a piece of lava and realized he could not reconcile the biblical and scientific explanations for the creation of the world. Soothed only partially by total immersion in his monograph on volcanoes, Nettleship grows more agitated upon learning that his son, in spite of a carefully secular education, has decided to become a priest:

> Mr. Nettleship felt it was his duty as a father to bring Lionel up with no false illusions. The boy should at least be spared the torments of disappointment which assailed a soul who lost its faith. He should be given no faith to lose in the first place.

Lionel is nonetheless quite enchanted with the faith he discovers, having fallen under the spell of an effusive travelling monk named Father Cuthbert. The despairing Nettleship receives no solace from his taciturn wife, Charlotte, who has become infatuated with a foolish young portrait painter named Lupton. This last outrage brings Nettleship close to total emotional dissolution: "Never, in forty years of interest in the volcanic surfaces of the world, had the professor felt so much sympathy with Etna and Vesuvius, nor felt so vividly what it might be like to erupt." To Nettleship's grim satisfaction, however, Lupton fails to return Charlotte's ardor and falls in love instead with her consumptive teenage daughter, Maudie, of whom Waldo Chatterway, an elderly family friend, is also enamored.

"'What had they been *doing* all summer except, quite simply, falling in love with each other?'" asks Chatterway at the novel's end. In fact, aside from Lionel's visit to a vision-ridden monastery in the Black Hills of Breconshire, little else beyond these emotional entanglements does take place. This is not to say that more mundane activity does not occur; there is plenty of travelling about, from homes to churches to clubs, and longer excursions to Brighton, Dover, and Oxford. Wilson fulfills all the outward requirements of the period novel, conveying ably enough the sense of bustle in the daily perambulations of his particular gentlemen and ladies, while at the same time trying to reflect the larger atmosphere of a rapidly changing society. He is also careful to adorn the book's various locales with a satisfying number of accurate details in costume, architectural ornament, food, and drink: Nottingham lace curtains, fricasseed kidneys, brocaded dressing gowns, treacle tart, whist. In addition to the many familiar interludes displaying Victorian good manners, the book contains a few scenes which provide less prosaic examples of nineteenth-century behavior. After Charlotte forbids her daughter, of whom she is bitterly jealous, to attend her first ball at Lionel's college, Nettleship finally performs his anticipated act of violence by raging at his wife for her flirtation with Lupton, then unceremoniously raping her.

With these particularized details and staged scenes, Wilson works hard to make the novel a completely realized world. Partly to show the seriousness of his intentions, but also partly to mock that seriousness, he sprinkles the names of many eminent Victorians around the periphery of the action. Characters casually mention Oscar Wilde and Henry James ("this bearded scribbling johnny") as young literary upstarts; Nettleship glimpses "Mr. Spencer and Mr. Huxley" at a lecture; George Eliot and Henry Lewes, we learn, are infrequent dinner guests at the Nettleship house; Charlotte's father remembers walking through Gray's Inn with Dickens; "poor darling mad Ruskin" is an object of gossip at Mr. Chatterway's club.

As our knowledge of these nonfictional figures blends with our understanding that the Nettleships of course never existed, we become increasingly aware that Wilson is

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trying satirically to emphasize the unreality of his characters. ("'We're living in the stories of our own composing,'" declares Mr. Chatterway at one point.) While this technique can be amusing at times, its interruption of the narrative comes to be annoying, often ruining our concentration on the story in which Wilson has carefully tried to make us believe. When Nettleship mentions George Eliot, or wishes that his troubles might end "as in the conclusion of some Dickensian romance," our attention drifts toward the complexities of *Middlemarch* or *Little Dorrit* and away from Nettleship's less convincingly presented preoccupations about faith and family unity. We sense in the constant references to the superiority of other novels Wilson's doubts in his ability to sustain his own narrative.

Like the perfect details of their costumes and meals, the problems of the characters are appropriate to their historical context; we immediately associate Nettleship's conflict between science and religion, for example, with this period. But if the problems are plausible, the characters are not. Nearly every person in the book exhibits a caricatured flaw without any accompanying dignity to make that person sympathetic: Chatterway dines with titled strangers, but flees from every responsibility toward his friends; Lupton is a slob and a hack; Nettleship is a self-deluding, pedantic bore; Father Cuthbert is an unflinching hypocrite; Charlotte a desperate, doomed romantic. Only Chatterway manages to mitigate his faults with any charm, and only Lionel is able to reach any serious conclusions in his search for faith. The rest are ridiculous people, and they engage our sympathy as little now as they would have for nineteenth-century readers.

Of course Wilson is not above making subtle self-ironic remarks about his inadequate attempts to elicit our sympathy. Toward the end of the book, in a discussion of the changes the Impressionists have made in current painting techniques, Lupton asks about the reasons for the innovations: "'Is it a sense that we mustn't do what our fathers

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and forefathers did?'" Charlotte's father replies, "'You'd paint like Sir Joshua if you *could*.'" So, we gather, would Wilson write like George Eliot if he could, but, failing that, he compromises by acknowledging his own inferior position in the literary pantheon and, as we have seen, by interrupting his fiction with self-conscious expressions of doubt about that fiction's ability to convince. We detect fragments of both self-blame and self-pity in Wilson's attitude, and the result is a very modern sense of irony that settles over this England like that country's famed mist.

There are intervals where Wilson drops the ironic tone and tries to convey a poignant sentiment, but he usually manages only to be trite: "How we assume as children, Mrs. Nettleship reflected, that life will go on exactly as before. And then, with a sigh, she reflected how rarely it does, and how rarely, as grown-ups, we want it to." "[Charlotte] wished that she could remember how to weep, for tears, if they knew how, should have come now to her dry eyes and washed away some of the immovable miseries of life."

The book's only effective moments occur when Nettleship assaults his wife (a brief scene, remarkable principally for the vulgarity of its violence in contrast to the novel's otherwise general sense of propriety), and when Lionel returns from the monastery at Breconshire with a redefined and more mature understanding of faith. In these scenes we are moved because the characters themselves have chosen to act, to move forward; at all other points, although they are carefully positioned and poised, their behavior is mechanical and their gestures empty of emotional weight. Wilson can dress them up, but he can't take them anywhere.

In *Gentlemen in England,* as in the whole of Wilson's work, there is access to a particular world, but no true sense of having actually arrived. All the necessary details appear in abundance, but this world is still shallow, missing a dimension, a vitality. It is to Wilson's credit that his ambition at least incorporates a sound knowledge of the best authors who have preceded him, and that he displays his respect toward their accomplishments during a period when literary fashion is dominated by an almost hysterical blindness toward the past. It is his misfortune, however, that he has yet to produce a novel that is as complex and poignant as it is reverent and clever.

Editor's note: We wish to call attention to the publication of Brad Leithauser's new collection of poems, *Cats of the Temple* (Knopf, $14.95). Several poems included in this volume first appeared in *The New Criterion.*

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Letters

Marxism, Princeton & Lawrence Stone

To the Editors:

Professor Norman Cantor's second attack on Lawrence Stone—in the Letters section of the December issue—is mephitic. Cantor manages to commit in a short space many of the worst sins that a historian can, including that of pride. He brags that the sect of historians to which he claims to belong ("liberal humanist" or "liberal conservative"—there's nothing like precision) is free from ideological bias in a way that its opponents are not. He lumps together as adherents of a single ideology ("a . . . subtle and poisonous Marxism"—whatever that is) historians of very different, even opposed views and methods. He misrepresents the views of his chief target, Stone, by selective quotation, inaccurate summary, and suppression of inconvenient facts. And he makes fantastic allegations about the conduct of the entire Princeton history department without producing a speck of evidence to support them.

If Professor Cantor showed any sign of open-mindedness or curiosity, we could debate these matters profitably—or at least refer the good professor to the works of the greatest living student of historiography, Arnaldo Momigliano, which would teach him that no historian past or present has ever gone to work without an ideology that determines his choice of questions and methods. Instead, we will urge anyone genuinely interested in our department to attend some of our many public lectures and seminars, to read some of our varied publications, or to examine the volumes produced by the Shelby Cullom Davis Center before taking Cantor's account as credible. Such an inspection will reveal that some of us are Marxists or neo-Marxists—terms that Cantor tries to convert into epithets. But it will also reveal that most of us adhere to very different positions, ranging from old-fashioned liberalism to High Tory classicism. In fact, we agree among ourselves on very little—except a general sense of comity and respect for one another's work, and a special sense of intellectual admiration for our colleague Lawrence Stone.

Anthony Grafton & Sean Wilentz
Department of History
Princeton University
Princeton, New Jersey

To the Editors:

Norman Cantor's article in the June issue of *The New Criterion,* "The Real Crisis in the Humanities Today," points to a problem that deserves serious attention: the deleterious effect on humanistic studies of the several varieties of Marxism and neo-Marxism, structuralism and deconstructionism, fashionable in American universities today. But because the problem is important, it is all the more important to make the proper distinctions.

Lawrence Stone is a social historian—not, as Cantor claims, a Marxist historian. And while there is a historical filiation, one might say (and I think Stone would agree), between social history and Marxist history, Stone himself has explicitly

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dissociated himself from Marxism in general and has repudiated the Marxist theories relating to his own subjects. He has tried instead to fashion a mode of social history that is not dependent upon the kind of economic or materialistic determinism associated with Marxism.

In using the term Marxism so loosely, Cantor unwittingly distracts attention from a school of historians to whom it does properly apply and who are influential enough to warrant serious concern.

Gertrude Himmelfarb
Department of History
Graduate School
City University of New York

To the Editors:

I was disappointed by Norman Cantor's article "The Real Crisis in the Humanities Today," by his reply to Robert Darnton, and by the editors of *The New Criterion,* who appear not to have placed any restraint on Cantor in the interest of either scholarly propriety or stylistic decency.

My disappointment is accentuated by my agreement with Cantor that, if or when they have their way, the academic generation that got their doctorates in the humanities between 1965 and 1975 may wreak havoc on their disciplines. As a reactionary (*not* a radical rightist) on educational matters since the 1930s when I first got wise to what the disciples of John Dewey at Teachers College were up to, I was hoping to hear from Cantor just how the intellectual wimps and mystagogues, of and from whom I have heard all too much in the past decade, were defending their pretentious nonsense.

In Cantor's article I found the following instead:

1) the standard dose of pop sociology, e.g., "Male, ambitiously middle class, frequently non-WASP—this was the social profile of the major humanities departments in the heyday of university expansion and academic prosperity, from about 1958 to about 1975. The sociological dimension was reflected in the ideological perspective of the leading humanists of the period—the perspective of cultural liberalism."

2) A *potpourri* of the latest hot stuff from Parisian intellectual *boites de nuit,* whose level of intelligibility was in no way augmented by Cantor's aversion to the nonsense that the daffy lot he dislikes lap up.

3) A propensity for intellectual name-dropping typical of a grown-up who, as a kid of three, could reel off the names of all the state capitals though he had never actually seen any of them.

4) A taste for deep-sounding but actually vacuous or unintelligible aphoristic statements, that an alert copy editor would have caught, e.g., "They were inclined to view the world through the consciousness of one person or a small group of people," and an even more lamentable taste for sentences chock-a-block with -ics, -istics, -ities, -ives, and especially -isms that a copy reader also should have deleted, e.g., "What Marxism, structuralism, and deconstruction most have in common is a distaste for cultural liberalism's neo-Romantic egoism and existential heroism. They wish to replace this humanistic individuality with the authenticity and integrity of an objective plane—whether the dialectic, the structure, or the 'textuality.'"

5) The fantastic illusion that Lawrence Stone is a Marxist.

Why in the world did *The New Criterion* feel obliged to donate five columns of its Letters section in December 1985 (pp. 85-88) to Cantor's grotesque response to Robert Darnton's note stating that he had known Lawrence Stone for seventeen years and considered him a liberal? Darnton himself is probably a liberal. I am, perhaps correctly, known in the profession as a reactionary old bastard. I have known Stone for more than a quarter century. My face-to-face acquaintance with him began in 1959, when I was touring Oxbridge to soothe the spirits of a number of dons on whom I had inflicted wounds in the preceding year, of whom he was one. I doubt that in a twenty-five-year friendship since that visit Professor Stone and I have fully agreed about anything up to now.

Now we seem wholly to agree that Cantor's letter is an egregious professional impropriety. The decencies of the historical profession require that when one quotes a source, one provide the reader a reference. There is nary a reference anywhere in the five dreary columns in which Cantor asserts that he confirms the statement "that Stone

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was and is an English Marxist," although the "proof" he presents on the point any competent historian would laugh at. Cantor has failed to provide readers with the customary citations for verifying any quotation he specifies or any allegation he makes. So there is no possibility of checking whether they are true and in fact sustain Cantor's charges. Of course they do not. They cannot since they do not contain a scintilla of evidence that Stone is or ever has been a Marxist. They cannot contain such evidence because no such evidence exists. It does not exist because Lawrence Stone is not and never has been a Marxist. Cantor's letter is a flimsy tissue of shabby innuendo and unsupported conjectures.

Several years ago, in revulsion at the mis-McGovernizing of my party and at having Yalies in their teens let the door at Sterling Library slam in my face because I was over thirty (over sixty actually), I began a slow quiet crawl to the right—and there I find Norman Cantor. Guess I'll start crawling back.

J. H. Hexter
Center for the History of Freedom
Washington University
St. Louis, Missouri

The Editors reply:

Of the many things worth noting in the letters we are here publishing in defense of Lawrence Stone and the Department of History at Princeton surely the most significant is that none of these correspondents has bothered to discuss or examine the key charge made by Professor Robert Darnton in his letter in the December 1985 issue of *The New Criterion*—the charge which prompted Norman Cantor to write at greater length about Stone's work as an historian than he had been concerned to do in his original article. The charge made by Professor Darnton was a very grave one—and it was all the graver, of course, because it completely misrepresented what Cantor had written about Stone in his June article. What Professor Darnton accused Cantor of was "a revival of McCarthyism."

From responsible intellectuals generally and from professional historians specifically we naturally expect damaging historical allusions of this sort to be employed with a high degree of accuracy and precision. Otherwise they amount to nothing but shabby name-calling. Now what exactly does it mean to invoke the specter of McCarthyism *in this dispute*? McCarthyism—as we are obliged to remind these distinguished historians—had a very specific historical content: it concerned charges of treason. Matters of opinion or belief were certainly involved, but they did not constitute the essence of what McCarthyism was. That essence was to be found specifically in the charge of treason and in the description of certain people as traitors.

In Norman Cantor's article on "The Real Crisis in the Humanities Today," he brought no charge of treason against anyone, and he certainly did not accuse Stone of being a traitor either to his native country or to his adopted one. What, then, did it mean for Professor Darnton to make such an inflammatory and unfounded accusation? And what does it mean for the distinguished historians represented in the above correspondence to allow the accusation to stand without so much as a nod of acknowledgment? What this means, alas, is that the charge of McCarthyism was made not in any attempt to clarify the issues in dispute but to halt all discussion of them, and to put the historical profession on notice that no discussion of them would be tolerated.

Since memories—even, it seems, among professional historians—tend to be short nowadays, it is also worth recalling that neither in Cantor's original article nor in his subsequent reply to Professor Darnton did he describe Stone as a Communist, a Leninist, or a Stalinist. In the original article Stone was said to be "an English Marxist, ideologically the disciple of the great English socialist historian R. H. Tawney." Cantor then went on to distinguish between Marxist scholars who belong to the camp of "the traditional Marxist-Leninists" and those he described as "the more humanistic, liberal, or 'Western' Marxists." Cantor also observed that "Marxism was now academically respectable," and he cited the Department of History at Princeton as a case in point.

On this last point we can be grateful to Professors Grafton and Wilentz for confirming that "Marxists or neo-Marxists" have indeed found

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the atmosphere in the Department of History at Princeton to be hospitable to their views. This was precisely what Cantor meant when he wrote that "Marxism was now academically respectable." On another point in their letter, however, Professors Grafton and Wilentz seriously misrepresent Cantor's original article. It is nonsense for them to claim that Cantor showed no awareness of the fact that "no historian past or present has ever gone to work without an ideology that determines his choice of questions and methods." From the very first paragraph of Cantor's article, in which he observed that "What is happening is that the dominance once enjoyed by liberal humanism is rapidly declining, and new ideologies have risen to a position of influence and power in the academic world," he addressed himself specifically to this point, and he made no secret of what ideological perspectives he had brought to his own work as an historian. One thing Professors Grafton and Wilentz clearly cannot be accused of is being close readers.

We are all the more grateful, therefore, for Professor Gertrude Himmelfarb's well-tempered letter in which it is acknowledged that, as she writes, "the deleterious effect on humanistic studies of the several varieties of Marxism and neo-Marxism, structuralism and deconstructionism, fashionable in American universities today" *is* an issue worth consideration. But when she goes on to observe that "there is a historical filiation . . . between social history [of the kind she believes Stone to be writing] and Marxist history" and then offers no analysis or clarification as to what the nature of this "filiation" might be, her protest is very much weakened. For it is precisely in this "historical filiation" that the crux of the matter will be found to lie. We can only hope that Professor Himmelfarb will find an opportunity to explore this important subject on some future occasion.

As for Professor J. H. Hexter, there is something truly wonderful in the spectacle of a scholar renowned on both sides of the Atlantic for the brutality and relentlessness of his polemical attacks on other historians now setting himself up as a disinterested arbiter of "scholarly propriety" and "stylistic decency." What is most interesting in Professor Hexter's letter, however, is not his attack on Norman Cantor but the revelation he offers us in his last sentence. Are we really to believe that the political convictions of the director of the Center for the History of Freedom are so shallow that they are determined less by principle than by the propinquity of an individual whose views he finds objectionable? That seems to be what Professor Hexter is saying in that last sentence, and we find it genuinely shocking.

On the question of Lawrence Stone and Marxism, the opinions of reputable scholars will clearly differ. What really distinguishes Norman Cantor from the historians represented in the above correspondence is that he believes the question is worth discussing and they do not, and whereas Cantor has been willing to cite specific texts and focus on the ideas which have shaped them, his critics merely howl in protest and offer something suspiciously akin to character references. But the only historian upon whose character there has been an attempted assassination is Norman Cantor—which is itself, we think, a clear sign that the issues raised in his article are of crucial importance for the future of the humanities in this country.

Let us, then, conclude this exchange by allowing the subject of the controversy to speak, as it were, for himself. In "A Life of Learning"—Lawrence Stone's Charles Homer Haskins Lecture, the text of which was published in the 1985 winter-spring Newsletter of the American Council of Learned Societies—we find a paragraph which casts a certain light (or should we say a certain shadow?) on the question of the author's relation to Marxism as it applies to the writing of history. In this paragraph of what might be called his intellectual autobiography Stone writes:

> During the late '50s, the expansion of my interests, which first began with the discovery of Weber, was further stimulated by two events. The first was that in 1958 I joined the Editorial Board of *Past and Present,* which in my—admittedly prejudiced—opinion is one of the two best historical journals in the world (*Annales: Economies, Civilisations, Societes* being the other). At that time the Board was equally divided between Marxists (many of them long-term members of the Communist Party who had only recently resigned after the Russian invasion of Hungary), and liberals like myself. But although it is

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a very active and contentious board there has never been an occasion, so far as I can recall, in which the division of opinion has been on ideological lines of Marxists versus liberals. This is a small fact about English intellectual history, which is, I believe, worth recording, although I have no explanation to offer for it.

It is a pity, we think, that Lawrence Stone could offer us no explanation for the situation he describes in this passage. Perhaps if he had, the exact relation in which his writing stands to Marxism of some variety or other would be clearer—even, possibly, to himself. Like Professor Himmelfarb's reference to the "historical filiation" which connects social history and Marxist history, a clarification of this as yet unelucidated "explanation" will be awaited with interest. In the meantime, reckless charges against those who, like Norman Cantor, have bravely broached the issue cannot be allowed to serve as a substitute for thought.

Correction

A typographical error in the Letters section of the January issue reversed the meaning of a sentence in Samuel Lipman's reply to Andrew Raeburn. Having quoted Mr. Raeburn saying that the names of contestants in the Van Cliburn Competition would appear in a newly edited videotape of this year's contest, Mr. Lipman wrote "Great news for music lovers, who will now be told to what and to whom they are listening . . . ." "Now" became "not" in the printed version of the reply. We regret the error.

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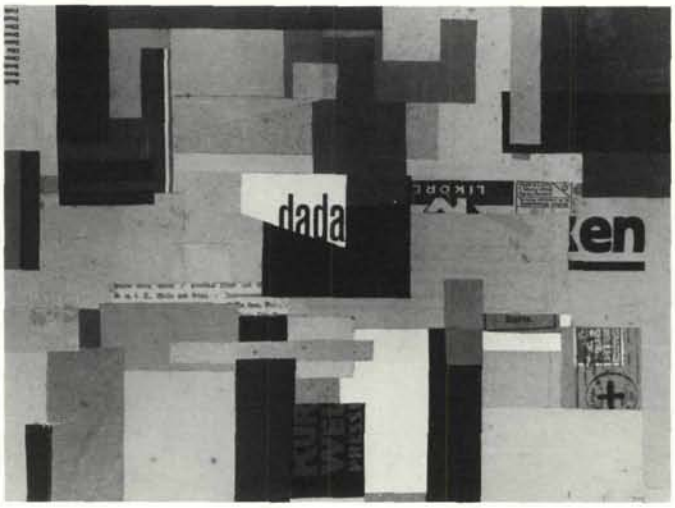

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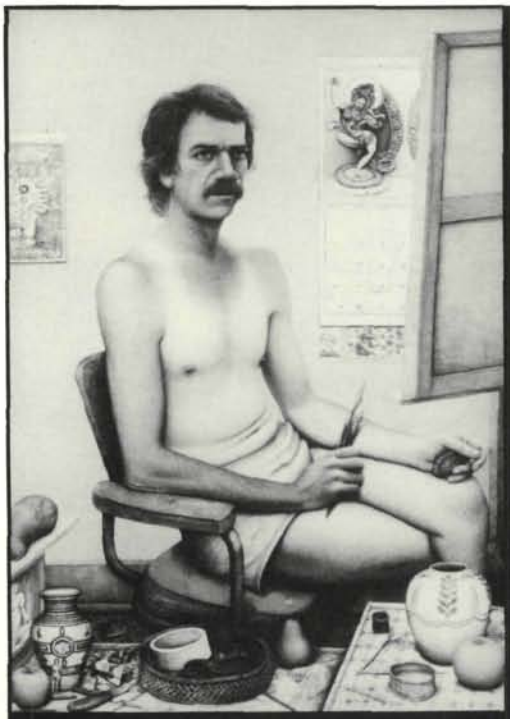

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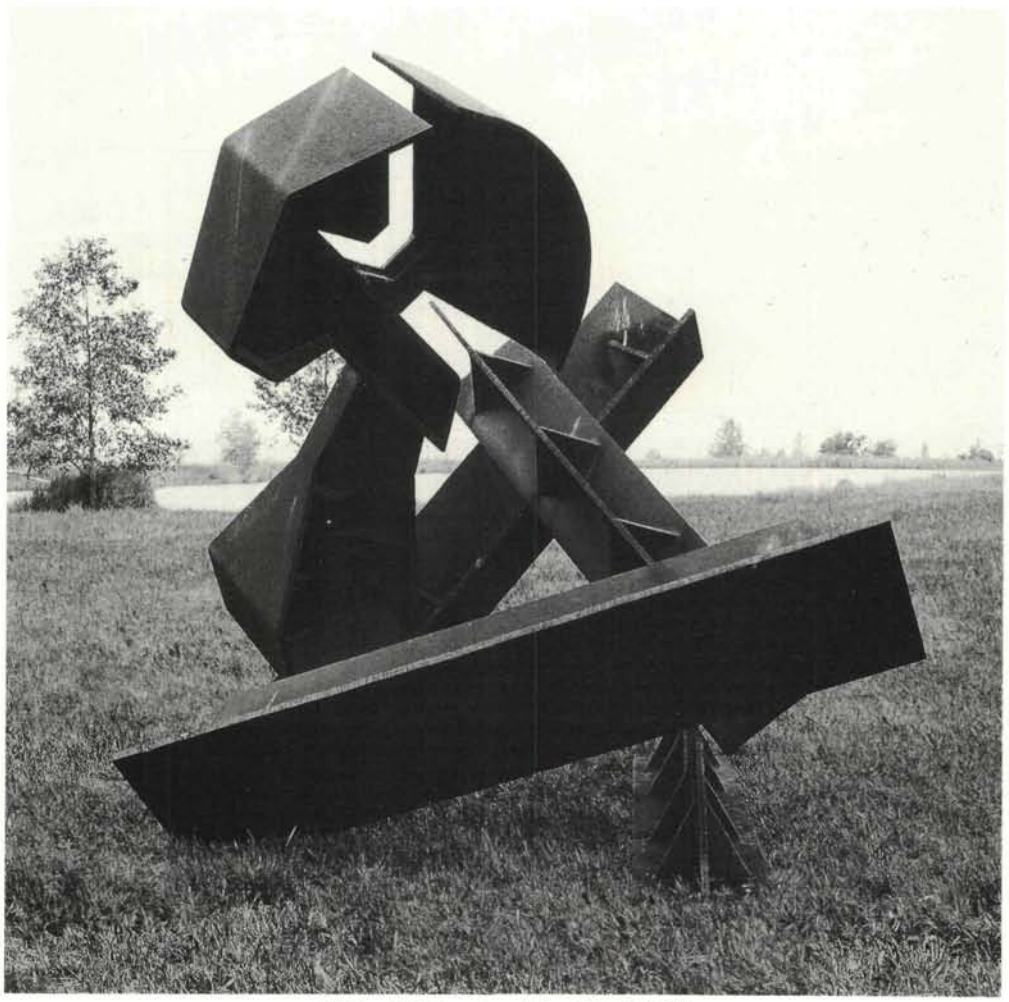

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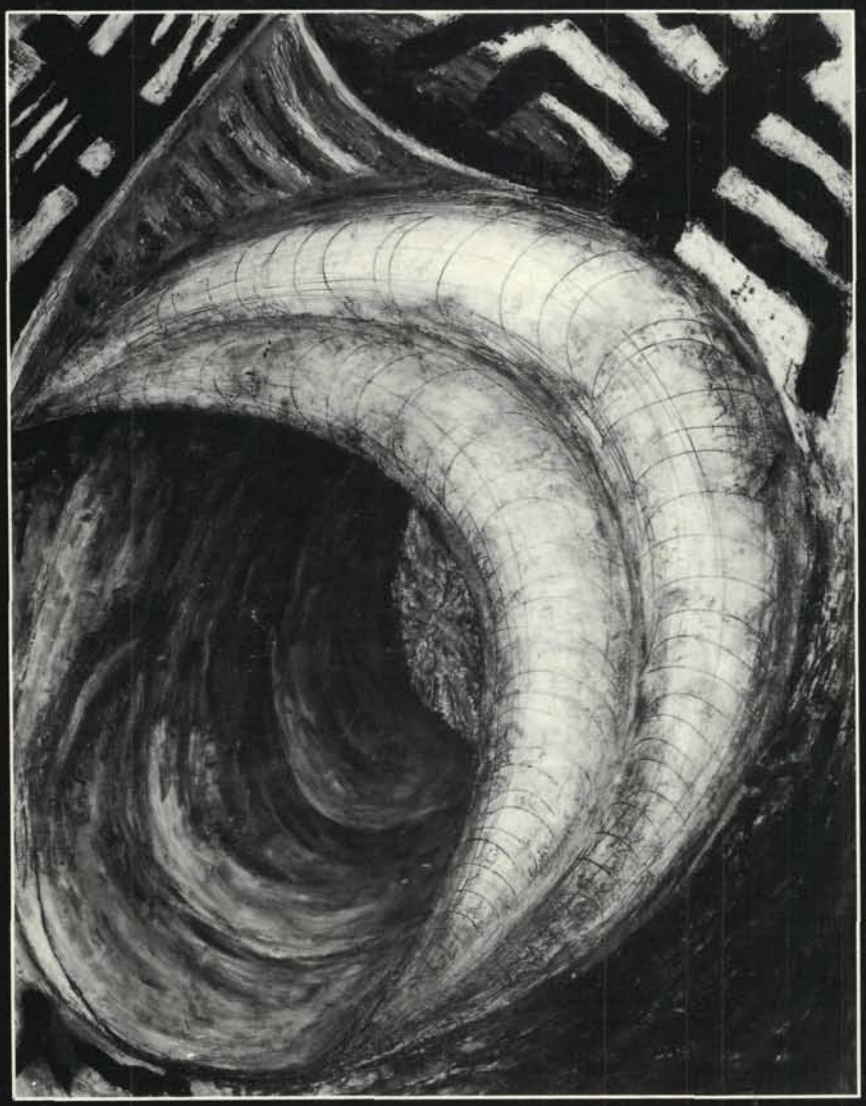

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